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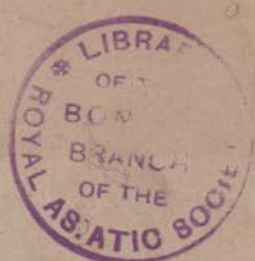
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BY

JOHN MORLEY.



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NOTE.

NEARLY the whole of the contents of the present volume have already appeared in the pages of the *Fortnightly Review*. They have all been submitted to revision, and some of them have been enlarged.

June 9, 1877.


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FRANCE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

FRANCE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.[1]

THE announcement that one of the most ingenious and accomplished men of letters in Europe was engaged upon a history of the French Revolution, raised some doubts among those who have thought most about the qualifications proper to the historian. M. Taine has the quality of the best type of a man of letters; he has the fine critical aptitude for seizing the secret of an author's or an artist's manner, for penetrating to dominant and central ideas, for marking the abstract and general under accidental forms in which they are concealed, for connecting the achievements of literature and art with facts of society and impulses of human character and life. He is the master of a style which, if it seems to lack the breadth, the firmness, the sustained and level strength of great writing, is yet always energetic, and fresh, and alive with that spontaneous reality and independence of interest which distinguishes the genuine writer from the mere weaver of sentences, and the servile mechanic of the pen. The matter and form alike of M. Taine's best work—and we say best, for his work is by no means without degrees and inequalities of worth—prove that he has not shrunk from the toil and austerity of the student, from that scorn of delight and living of laborious days, by which only

[1] *Les Origines de la France Contemporaine.* Tom. i. *L'Ancien Régime.* Par H. Taine. Paris: Hachette. 1876.

can men either get command of the art of just and finished expression, or gather to themselves much knowledge.

But with all its attractiveness and high uses of its own, the genius for literature in its proper sense is distinct from the genius for political history. The discipline is different, because the matter is different. To criticise Rousseau's Social Contract requires one set of attainments, and to judge the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly or the Convention requires a set of quite different attainments. A man may have the keenest sense of the filiation of ideas, of their scope and purport, and yet have a very dull or uninterested eye for the play of material forces, the wayward tides of great gatherings of men, the rude and awkward methods that sometimes go to the attainment of wise political ends.

It would perhaps not be too bold to lay down this proposition: that no good social history has ever been written by a man who has not either himself taken a more or less active part in public affairs, or else been an habitual intimate of persons who were taking such a part on a considerable scale. Everybody knows what Gibbon said about the advantage to the historian of the Roman Empire of having been a member of the English parliament and a captain in the Hampshire grenadiers. Thucydides commanded an Athenian squadron, and Tacitus filled the offices of prætor and consul. Xenophon, Polybius, and Sallust, were all men of affairs and public adventure. Guicciardini was an ambassador, a ruler, and the counsellor of rulers; and Machiavel was all these things and more. Voltaire was the keen-eyed friend of the greatest princes and statesmen of his time, and was more than once engaged in diplomatic transactions. Robertson was a powerful party chief in the Assembly of the Scotch Church. Grote and Macaulay were active members of parliament, and Hallam and Milman

were confidential members of circles where affairs of State were the staple of daily discussion among the men who were responsible for conducting them to successful issues. Guizot was a prime minister, Finlay was a farmer of the Greek revenue. The most learned of contemporary English historians a few years ago contested a county, and is habitually inspired in his researches into the past by his interest in the politics of the present. The German historians, whose gifts in reconstructing the past are so valuable and so singular, have for the most part been as actively interested in the public movements of to-day, as in those of any century before or since the Christian era. Niebuhr held more than one political post of dignity and importance; and of historical writers in our time, one has sat in several Prussian parliaments; another, once the tutor of a Prussian prince, has lived in the atmosphere of high politics; while all the best of them have taken their share in the preparation of the political spirit and ideas that have restored Germany to all the fulness and exaltation of national life.

It is hardly necessary to extend the list. It is indeed plain on the least reflection that close contact with political business, however modest in its pretensions, is the best possible element in the training of any one who aspires to understand and reproduce political history. Political preparation is as necessary as literary preparation. There is no necessity that the business should be on any majestic and imperial scale. To be a guardian of the poor in an East-End parish, to be behind the scenes of some great strike of labour, to be an active member of the parliamentary committee of a Trades Council or of the executive committee of a Union or a League, may be quite as instructive discipline as participation in mightier scenes. Those who write concrete history, without ever having taken part in practical politics,

are, one might say, in the position of those ancients who wrote about the human body without ever having effectively explored it by dissection. Mr. Carlyle, it is true, by force of penetrating imaginative genius, has reproduced in stirring and resplendent dithyrambs the fire and passion, the rags and tears, the many-tinted dawn and the blood-red sunset of the French Revolution; and the more a man learns about the details of the Revolution, the greater is his admiration for Mr. Carlyle's magnificent performance. But it is dramatic presentation, not social analysis; a masterpiece of literature, not a scientific investigation; a prodigy of poetic insight, not a sane and quantitative exploration of the complex processes, the deep-lying economical, fiscal, and political conditions, that prepared so immense an explosion.

We have to remember, it is true, that M. Taine is not professing to write a history in the ordinary sense. His book lies, if we may use two very pompous but indispensable words, partly in the region of historiography, but much more in the region of sociology. The study of the French Revolution cannot yet be a history of the past, for the French still walk *per ignes suppositos*, and the Revolution is still some way from being fully accomplished. It was the disputes between the Roman and the Reformed churches which inspired historical research in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; it is the disputes among French parties that now inspire what professes to be historiography, but what is really a sort of experimental investigation in the science of society. They little know how long and weary a journey lies before them, said Burke, who undertake to bring great masses of men into the political unity of a nation. The process is still going on, and a man of M. Taine's lively intellectual sensibility can no more escape its influences than he can escape the ingre-

dients of the air he breathes. We may add that if his work had been really historic, he must inevitably have gone further back than the eighteenth century for the 'Origins' of contemporary France. The very slight, vague, and unsubstantial chapter with which he opens his work, cannot be accepted as a substitute for what the subject really demanded—a serious summary, however condensed and rapid, of the various forces, accidents, deliberate lines of policy, which, from the breaking up of the great fiefs down to the death of Lewis the Fourteenth, had prepared the distractions of the monarchy under Lewis's descendants.

Full of interest as it is, M. Taine's book can hardly be described as containing much that is new or strikingly significant. He developes one idea, indeed, which we have never before seen stated in its present form, but which if it implies more than has been often advanced by previous writers in other forms, cannot be accepted as true. This is perhaps a point better worth discussing than any other which his book raises. The rest is a very elaborate and thorough description of the structure of society, of its physiognomy in manners and characteristics, the privileges, the burdens, the daily walk and conversation of the various classes which made up the French people between the Regency and the Revolution. M. Taine's method of description does not strike one as altogether happy. It is a common complaint against French historians that they are too lax about their authorities, and too heedless about giving us chapter and verse for their assertions. M. Taine goes to the contrary extreme, and pours his note-books into his text with a steady-handed profusion that is excessively fatiguing, and makes the result far less effective than it would have been if all this industrious reading had been thoroughly fused and recast into a homogeneous whole. It is an ungenerous

trick of criticism to disparage good work by comparing it with better; but the reader can scarcely help contrasting M. Taine's overcrowded pages with the perfect assimilation, the pithy fulness, the pregnant meditation, of De Tocqueville's book on the same subject. When we attempt to reduce M. Taine's chapters to a body of propositions standing out in definite relief from one another, yet conveying a certain unity of interpretation, we soon feel how possible it is for an author to have literary clearness along with historic obscurity.

In another respect we are inclined to question the felicity of M. Taine's method. It does not convey the impression of movement. The steps and changes in the conflict among the organs of the old society are not marked in their order and succession. The reader is not kept alive to the gradual progress of the break-up of old institutions and ideas. The sense of an active and ceaseless struggle, extending in various stages across the century, is effaced by an exclusive attention to the social details of a given phase. We need the story. You cannot effectively reproduce the true sense and significance of such an epoch as the eighteenth century in France, without telling us, however barely, the tale, for example, of the long battle of the ecclesiastical factions, and the yet more important series of battles between the judiciary and the crown. If M. Taine's book were a piece of abstract social analysis, the above remark would not be true. But it is a study of the concrete facts of French life and society, and to make such a study effective, the element of the chronicle, as in Lacretelle or Jobez, cannot rightly be dispensed with.

Let us proceed to the chief thesis of the book. The new formula in which M. Taine describes the source of all the mischiefs of the revolutionary doctrine is this. 'When we see a

man,' he says, 'who is rather weak in constitution, but apparently sound and of peaceful habits, drink eagerly of a new liquor, then suddenly fall to the ground, foaming at the mouth, delirious and convulsed, we have no hesitation in supposing that in the pleasant draught there was some dangerous ingredient; but we need a delicate analysis in order to decompose and isolate the poison. There is one in the philosophy of the eighteenth century, as curious as it was potent: for not only is it the product of a long historic elaboration, the final and condensed extract in which the whole thought of the century ends; but more than that, its two principal elements are peculiar in this, that when separated they are each of them salutary, yet in combination they produce a poisonous compound.' These two ingredients are, first, the great and important acquisitions of the eighteenth century in the domain of physical science; second, the fixed classic form of the French intelligence. 'It is the classic spirit which, being applied to the scientific acquisitions of the time, produced the philosophy of the century and the doctrines of the Revolution.' This classic spirit has in its literary form one or two well-known marks. It leads, for instance, to the fastidious exclusion of particulars, whether in phrases, objects, or traits of character, and substitutes for them the general, the vague, the typic. Systematic arrangement orders the whole structure and composition from the period to the paragraph, from the paragraph to the structural series of paragraphs; it dictates the style as it has fixed the syntax. Its great note is the absolute. Again, 'two principal operations make up the work of the human intelligence: placed in face of things, it receives the impression of them more or less exactly, completely, and profoundly; next, leaving the things, it decomposes its impression, and classifies, distributes, and expresses more or

less skilfully the ideas that it draws from that impression. In the second of these processes the classic is superior.' Classicism is only the organ of a certain reason, the *raison raisonnante;* that which insists upon thinking with as little preparation and as much ease as possible; which is contented with what it has acquired, and takes no thought about augmenting or renewing it; which either cannot or will not embrace the plenitude and the complexity of things as they are.

As an analysis of the classic spirit in French literature, nothing can be more ingenious and happy than these pages (p. 241, etc.). But, after all, classic is only the literary form preferred by a certain turn of intelligence; and we shall do well to call that turn of intelligence by a general name, that shall comprehend not only its literary form but its operations in every other field. And accordingly at the end of this very chapter we find M. Taine driven straightway to change classic for mathematic in describing the method of the new learning. And the latter description is much better, for it goes beneath the surface of literary expression, important as that is, down to the methods of reasoning. It leads us to the root of the matter, to the deductive habits of the French thinkers. The mischief of the later speculation of the eighteenth century in France was that men argued about the complex, conditional, and relative propositions of society, as if they had been theorems and problems of Euclid. And M. Taine himself is, as we say, compelled to change his term when he comes to the actual facts and personages of the revolutionary epoch. It was the geometric, rather than the classic, quality of political reasoning, which introduced so much that we now know to have been untrue and mischievous.

Even in literary history it is surely nearer the truth to say

of the latter half of the century that the revolutionary movement began with the break-up of classic form and the gradual dissolution of the classic spirit. Indeed this is such a commonplace of criticism, that we can only treat M. Taine's inversion of it as a not very happy paradox. It was in literature that this genius of innovation which afterwards extended over the whole social structure, showed itself first of all. Rousseau, not merely in the judgment of a foreigner like myself, but in that of the very highest of all native authorities, Sainte Beuve, effected the greatest revolution that the French tongue had undergone since Pascal. And this revolution was more remarkable for nothing than for its repudiation of nearly all the notes of classicism that are enumerated by M. Taine. Diderot, again, in every page of his work, whether he is discussing painting, manners, science, the drama, poetry, or philosophy, abounds and overabounds in those details, particularities, and special marks of the individual, which are, as M. Taine rightly says, alien to the classic genius. Both Rousseau and Diderot, considered as men of letters, were conscious literary revolutionists, before they were used as half-conscious social revolutionists. They deliberately put away from them the entire classic tradition as to the dignity of personage proper to art, and the symmetry and fixed method proper to artistic style. This was why Voltaire, who was a son of the seventeenth century before he was the patriarchal sire of the eighteenth, could never thoroughly understand the author of the New Heloisa, or the author of the Père de Famille and Jacques le Fataliste. Such work was to him for the most part a detestable compound of vulgarity and rodomontade. 'There is nothing living in the eighteenth century,' M. Taine says, 'but the little sketches that are stitched in by the way and as if they were contraband, by Voltaire, and five or six

portraits like Turcaret, Gil Blas, Marianne, Manon Lescaut, Rameau's Nephew, Figaro, two or three hasty sketches of Crebillon the younger and Collé' (p. 258). Nothing living but this! But this is much and very much. We do not pretend to compare the authors of these admirable delineations with Molière and La Bruyère in profundity of insight or in grasp and ethical mastery, but they are certainly altogether in a new vein even from those two great writers, when we speak of the familiar, the real, and the particular, as distinguished from old classic generality. And, we may add in passing, that the social life of France from the death of Lewis XIV. downwards was emancipated all round from the formality and precision of the classic time. As M. Taine himself shows in many amusing pages, life was singularly gay, free, sociable, and varied. The literature of the time was sure to reflect, and does reflect, this universal rejection of the restraints of the past age when the classic spirit had been supreme.

Apart from this kind of objection to its exact expression, let us look at the substance of M. Taine's dictum. 'It was the classic spirit, which, when applied to the scientific acquisitions of the time, produced the philosophy of the century and the doctrines of the Revolution.' Even if we substitute geometric or deductive spirit for classic spirit, the proposition remains nearly as unsatisfactory. What were the doctrines of the Revolution? The sovereignty of the people, rights of man, liberty, equality, fraternity, progress and perfectibility of the species—these were the main articles of the new creed. M. Taine, like too many French writers, writes as if these ideas had never been heard of before '89. Yet the most important and decisive of them were at least as old as the Reformation, were not peculiarly French in any sense, and were no more the special products of the classic spirit mixing with scientific

acquisitions, than they were the products of Manicheanism. It is extraordinary that a writer who attributes so much importance to Rousseau, and who gives us so ample an account of his political ideas, should not have traced these ideas to their source, nor even told us that they had a source wholly outside of France. Rousseau was a Protestant; he was a native of the very capital and mother city of Protestantism, militant and democratic; and he was penetrated to his heart's core by the political ideas which had arisen in Europe at the Reformation. There is not a single principle in the Social Contract which may not be found either in Hobbes, or in Locke, or in Althusen, any more than there is a single proposition of his deism which was not in the air of Geneva when he wrote his Savoyard Vicar. If this be the case, what becomes of the position that the revolutionary philosophy was worked out by the *raison raisonnante*, which is the special faculty of a country saturated with the classic spirit? If we must have a formula, it would be nearer the truth to say that the doctrines of the Revolution were the product, not of the classic spirit applied to scientific acquisitions, but, first, of the democratic ideas of the Protestant Reformation, and then of the fictions of the lawyers, both of them allied with certain urgent social and political necessities.

So much, then, for the political side of the 'philosophy of the century,' if we are to use this too comprehensive expression for all the products of a very complex and many-sided outburst of speculative energy. Apart from its political side, we find M. Taine's formula no less unsatisfactory for its other phases. He seems to us not to go back nearly far enough in his search for the intellectual origins, any more than for the political origins, of his contemporary France. He has taken no account of the progress of the spirit of Scepticism from

Montaigne's time, nor of the decisive influence of Montaigne on the revolutionary thinkers. Yet the extraordinary excitement aroused in France by Bayle's Dictionary was a proof of the extent to which the sceptical spirit had spread before the Encyclopædists were born. The great influence of Fontenelle was wholly in the same sceptical direction. There was a strong sceptical element in French Materialism, even when materialism was fully developed and seemed most dogmatic.[1] Indeed, it may sometimes occur to the student of such a man as Diderot, to wonder how far materialism in France was only seized upon as a means of making scepticism both serious and philosophic. For its turn for scepticism is at least as much a distinction of the French intelligence, as its turn for classicism. And, once more, if we must have a formula, it would be best to say that the philosophy of the century was the product, first, of scepticism applied to old beliefs which were no longer easily tenable, and then of scepticism extended to old institutions that were no longer practically habitable.

And this brings us to the cardinal reason for demurring to M. Taine's neatly rounded proposition. His appreciation of the speculative precursors of the Revolution seems to us to miss the decisive truth about them. He falls precisely into those errors of the *raison raisonnante*, about which, in his description of the intellectual preparation of the great overthrow, he has said so many just and acute things. Nothing can be more really admirable than M. Taine's criticism upon Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, as great masters of language (pp. 339-361). All this is marked by an amplitude of handling, a variety of approach, a subtlety of perception, a fulness of comprehension, which give a very different notion of M. Taine's critical soundness and power, from any that one could have got from his

[1] See Lange's *Geschichte des Materialismus*, i. 298.

account elsewhere of our English writers. Some of the remarks are open to criticism, as might be expected. It is hard to accept the saying (p. 278) that Montesquieu's 'celebrity was not an influence.' It was Montesquieu, after all, who first introduced among the Encyclopædic band a rationalistic and experiential conception of the various legal and other conditions of the social union, as distinguished from the old theological explanation of them. The correspondence of Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, D'Alembert, is sufficient to show how immediately, as well as how powerfully, they were influenced by Montesquieu's memorable book. Again, it is surely going too far to say that Montesquieu's Persian Letters contained every important idea of the century. Does it, for instance, contain that thrice fruitful idea which Turgot developed in 1750, of all the ages being linked together by an ordered succession of causes and effects? These and other objections, however, hardly affect the brilliance and substantial excellence of all this part of the book. It is when he proceeds to estimate these great men, not as writers but as social forces, not as stylists but as apostles, that M. Taine discloses the characteristic weaknesses of the book-man in dealing with the facts of concrete sociology. He shows none of this weakness in what he says of the remote past. On the contrary, he blames, as we have all blamed, Voltaire, Rousseau, and the rest of the group, for their failure to recognize that the founders of religions satisfied a profound need in those who accepted them, and that this acceptance was the spontaneous admission of its relative fitness. It would be impossible to state this important truth better than M. Taine has done in the following passage:—

'At certain critical moments in history,' he says, 'men have come out from the narrow and confined track of their daily life, and seized in one wide vision the infinite universe;

the august face of eternal nature is suddenly unveiled before them; in the sublimity of their emotion they seem to perceive the very principle of its being; and at least they did discern some of its features. By an admirable stroke of circumstance, these features were precisely the only ones that their age, their race, a group of races, a fraction of humanity, happened to be in a condition to understand. Their point of view was the only one under which the multitudes beneath could place themselves. For millions of men, for hundreds of generations, the only one access to divine things was along their path. They pronounced the unique word, heroic or tender, enthusiastic or tranquillising; the only word that, around them and after them, the heart and the intelligence would consent to hearken to; the only one adapted to the deep-growing wants, the long-gathered aspirations, the hereditary faculties, a whole moral and mental structure,—here to that of the Hindu or the Mongol, there to that of the Semite or the European, in our Europe to that of the German, the Latin, or the Slav; in such a way that its very contradictions, instead of condemning it, were exactly what justified it, since its diversity produced its adaptation, and its adaptation produced its benefits.' (p. 272.)

It is extraordinary that a thinker who could so clearly discern the secret of the great spiritual movements of human history, should fail to perceive that the same law governs and explains all the minor movements in which wide communities have been suddenly agitated by the word of a teacher. It is well—as no one would be more likely to contend than myself, who have attempted the task—to demonstrate the contradictions, the superficiality, the inadequateness, of the teaching of Rousseau, Voltaire, or Diderot. But it is well also, and in a historical student it is not only well, but the very pith and marrow of criticism, to search for that 'adaptation,' to use M.

Taine's very proper expression, which gave to the word of these teachers its mighty power and far-spreading acceptance. Is it not as true of Rousseau and Voltaire, acting in a small society, as it is of Buddha or Mahomet acting on vast groups of races, that 'leur point de vue était le seul auquel les multitudes échelonnées au dessous d'eux pouvaient se mettre?' Did not they too seize, 'by a happy stroke of circumstance,' exactly those traits in the social union, in the resources of human nature, in its deep-seated aspirations, which their generation was in a condition to comprehend,—liberty, equality, fraternity, progress, justice, tolerance?

M. Taine shows, as so many others have shown before him, that the Social Contract, when held up in the light of true political science, is very poor stuff. Undoubtedly it is so. And Quintilian—an accomplished and ingenious Taine of the first century—would have thought the Gospels and Epistles, and Augustine and Jerome and Chrysostom, very poor stuff, compared with the—

> 'Mellifluous streams that watered all the schools
> Of Academics old and new, with those
> Surnamed Peripatetics, and the Sect
> Epicurean, and the Stoic severe.'

And in some ways, from a literary or logical point of view, the early Christian writers could ill bear this comparison. But great bodies of men, in ages of trouble and confusion, have an instinctive feeling for the fragment of truth which they happen to need at the hour. They have a spontaneous apprehension of the formula which is at once the expression of their miseries and the mirror of their hope. The guiding force in the great changes of the world has not been the formal logic of the schools or of literature, but the practical logic of social convenience. Men take as much of a teacher's doctrine as meets

their real wants: the rest they leave. The Jacobins accepted Rousseau's ideas about the sovereignty of the people, but they seasonably forgot his glorification of the state of nature and his denunciations of civilisation and progress. The American revolutionists cheerfully borrowed the doctrine that all men are born free and equal, but they kept their slaves.

It was for no lack of competition that the ideas of the Social Contract, of Raynal's History of the two Indies, of the System of Nature, of the Philosophical Dictionary, made such astounding and triumphant way in men's minds. There was Montesquieu with a sort of historic method. There was Turgot, and the school of the economists. There were seventy thousand of the secular clergy, and sixty thousand of the regular clergy, ever proclaiming by life or exhortation ideas of peace, submission, and a kingdom not of this world. Why did men turn their backs on these and all else, and betake themselves to revolutionary ideas? How came those ideas to rise up and fill the whole air? The answer is that, with all their contradiction, shallowness, and danger, such ideas fitted the crisis. They were seized by virtue of an instinct of national self-preservation. The evil elements in them worked themselves out in infinite mischief. The true elements in them saved France, by firing men with social hope and patriotic faith.

How was it, M. Taine rightly asks, that the philosophy of the eighteenth century, which was born in England and thence sent its shoots to France, dried up in the one country, and grew to overshadow the earth in the other? Because, he answers, the new seed fell upon ground that was suited to it, the home of the classic spirit, the country of *raison raisonnante*. Compare with this merely literary solution, the answer given to the same question by De Tocqueville:—'It was no accident

that the philosophers of the eighteenth century generally conceived notions so opposed to those which still served as the base of the society of their time; *these ideas had actually been suggested to them by the very sight of that society, which they had ever before their eyes.*' (*Ancien Régime*, 206.) This is the exact truth and the whole truth. The greatest enterprise achieved by the men of letters in the period of intellectual preparation was the Encyclopædia; and I have elsewhere tried to present what seemed to be ample evidence that the spirit and aim of that great undertaking were social, and that its conductors, while delivering their testimony in favour of the experiential conception of life in all its aspects, and while reproducing triumphantly the most recent acquisitions of science, had still the keenest and most direct eye for the abuses and injustice, the waste and disorder, of the social institutions around them. The answer, then, which we should venture to give to M. Taine's question would be much simpler than his. The philosophy of the eighteenth century fared differently in England and in France, because its ideas did not fit in with the economic and political conditions of the one, while, on the contrary, they were actively warmed and fostered by those of the other. It was not a literary aptitude in the nation for *raison raisonnante*, which developed the political theories of Rousseau, the moral and psychological theories of Diderot, the anti-ecclesiastical theories of Voltaire and Holbach. It was the profound disorganization of institutions that suggested and stimulated the speculative agitation. 'The nation,' wrote the wise and far-seeing Turgot, 'has no constitution; it is a society composed of different orders ill assorted, and of a people whose members have few social bonds with one another; where consequently scarcely any one is occupied with anything beyond his private interest exclusively,' and so forth. (*Œuv.*

ii. 504.) Any student, uncommitted to a theory, who examines in close detail the wise aims and just and conservative methods of Turgot, and the circumstances of his utter rout after a short experiment of twenty months of power, will rise from that deplorable episode with the conviction that a pacific renovation of France, an orderly readjustment of her institutions, was hopelessly impossible. '*Si on avait été sage!*' those cry who consider the Revolution as a futile mutiny. If people had only been prudent, all would have been accomplished that has been accomplished since, and without the sanguinary memories, the constant interpolations of despotism, the waste of generous lives and noble purpose. And this is true. But then prudence itself was impossible. The court and the courtiers were smitten through the working of long tradition by judicial blindness. If Lewis XVI. had been a Frederick, or Marie Antoinette had been a Catherine of Russia, or the nobles had even been stout-hearted gentlemen like our Cavaliers, the great transformation might then have been gradually effected without disorder. But they were none of these, and it was their characters that made the fate and doom of the situation. As for the court, Vergennes used an expression which suggests the very keyword of the situation. He had been ambassador in Turkey, and was fond of declaring that he had learnt in the seraglio how to brave the storms of Versailles. Versailles was like Stamboul or Teheran, oriental in etiquette, oriental in destruction of wealth and capital, oriental in antipathy to a reforming grand vizier. It was the Queen, as we now know by incontestable evidence, who persuaded the King to dismiss Turgot, merely to satisfy some contemptible personal resentments of herself and her creatures.[1] And it was not in Turgot's case only that this ineptitude

[1] *Corresp. entre Marie Thérèse et le Comte Mercy-Argenteau*, vol. iii.

wrought mischief. In June, 1789, Necker was overruled in the wisest elements of his policy and sent into exile, by the violent intervention of the same court faction, headed by the same Queen, who had procured the dismissal of Turgot thirteen years earlier. And it was one long tale throughout, from the first hour of the reign, down to those last hours at the Tuileries in August, 1792; one long tale of intrigue, perversity, and wilful incorrigible infatuation.

Nor was the Queen only to blame. Turgot, says an impartial eyewitness—Creutz, the Swedish ambassador—is a mark for the most formidable league possible, composed of all the great people in the kingdom, all the parliaments, all the finance, all the women of the court, and all the bigots. It was morally impossible that the reforms of any Turgot could have been acquiesced in by that emasculated caste, who showed their quality a few years after his dismissal by flying across the frontier at the first breath of personal danger, 'When the gentlemen rejoiced so boisterously over the fall of Turgot, their applause was blind; on that day they threw away, and in a manner that was irreparable, the opportunity that was offered them of being born again to political life, and changing the state-candlestick of the royal household for the influence of a preponderant class. The nobility, defeated on the field of feudal privilege, would have risen again by the influence of an assembly where they would have taken the foremost place; by defending the interests of all, by becoming in their turn the ally of the third estate, which had hitherto fought on the side of the kings, they would have repaired the unbroken succession of defeats that had been inflicted on them since Lewis the Fat.'[1] It would be easy to name half a dozen patricians like the Duke d'Ayen, of exceptional public spirit and capacity,

[1] *Turgot, Philosophe et Economiste.* Par. A. Batbie: p. 280.

but a proud order cannot at the first exigency of a crisis change its traditional front, and abandon the maxims of centuries in a day. As has been said more than once, the oriental policy of the crown towards the nobles had the inevitable effect of cutting them off from all opportunity of acquiring in experience those habits of political wisdom which have saved the territorial aristocracy of our own country. The English nobles in the eighteenth century had become, what they mostly are now, men of business; agriculturists at least as much as politicians; land-agents of a very dignified kind, with very large incomes. Sully designed to raise a working agricultural aristocracy, and Colbert to raise a working commercial aristocracy. But the statesman cannot create or mould a social order at will. Perhaps one reason why the English aristocracy became a truly agricultural body in the eighteenth century, was the circumstance that many of the great landowning magnates were Tories and remained sulking on their estates rather than go to the court of the first two kings of the Hanoverian line; just as the dependence of these two sovereigns of revolutionary title upon the revolution families, is one reason why English liberties had time to root themselves thoroughly before the monarchical reaction under George III. In France, for reasons which we have no room to expatiate upon, the experiments both of Sully and of Colbert failed. The result may be read with graphic effect in the pages of Arthur Young, both before the Revolution broke out, and again after Burke's superb rhetoric had biased English opinion against it.

M. Léonce de Lavergne, it is true, in his most interesting book upon the Provincial Assemblies under Lewis XVI., has endeavoured to show that in the great work of administrative reform all classes between 1778 and 1787 had shown themselves full of a liberal and practical spirit. But even in his pages we

see enough of apprehensions and dissensions to perceive how deep was the intestine disorganization; and the attitude of the nobles in 1789 demonstrated how incurable it was by any merely constitutional modifications. Sir Philip Francis, to whom Burke submitted the proof-sheets of the Reflections, at once with his usual rapid penetration discerned the weakness of the anti-revolutionary position. 'The French of this day,' he told Burke, 'could not act as we did in 1688. They had no constitution as we had to recur to. They had no foundation to build upon. They had no walls to repair. Much less had they "*the elements of a constitution very nearly as good as could be wished.*" A proposition so extraordinary as this last ought to have been made out *in limine*, since the most important deductions are drawn from it.'[1] But, though Burke insisted on drawing his deductions from it with sweeping impetuosity, neither he nor any one else has yet succeeded in establishing that all-important proposition.

What we desire to say, then, comes, in short, to this, that M. Taine has given an exaggerated importance to the literary and speculative activity of the last half century of the old monarchy. In measuring the force of the various antecedents of the Revolution, he has assigned to books and philosophical ideas a place in the scale of dissolvent conditions, that belongs more rightly to decayed institutions, to incompetent and incorrigible castes, to economic incongruities that could only be dealt with trenchantly. Books and ideas acquired a certain importance, after other things had finally broken up the crumbling system. They supplied a formula for the accomplished fact. 'It was after the Revolution had fairly begun,' as a contemporary says, 'that they sought in Mably and Rousseau for arms to sustain the system towards which the effervescence

[1] Burke's *Correspondence*, iii. 167.

of some hardy spirits was dragging affairs. It was not the above-named authors who set people's heads aflame. M. Necker alone produced this effect, and determined the explosion.'[1]

The predominance of a historic, instead of an abstract, school of political thought could have saved nothing. It could have saved nothing, because the historic or conservative organs and elements of society were incompetent to realize those progressive ideas which were quite as essential to social continuity as the historic ideas. The historic method in political action is only practicable on condition that some, at any rate, of the great established bodies have the sap of life in their members. In France not even the judiciary, usually the last to part from its ancient roots, was sound and quick. 'The administration of justice,' says Arthur Young, 'was partial, venal, infamous. The conduct of the parliament was profligate and atrocious. The bigotry, ignorance, false principles, and tyranny of these bodies were generally conspicuous.'[2] We know what the court was, we know what the noblesse was, and this is what the third great leading order in the realm was. We repeat, then, that the historic doctrine could get no fulcrum nor leverage, and that only the revolutionary doctrine, which the eighteenth century had got ready for the crisis, was adequate to the task of social renovation.

Again, we venture to put to M. Taine the following question. If the convulsions of 1789—94 were due to the revolutionary doctrine, if that doctrine was the poison of the movement, how would he explain the firm, manly, steadfast, unhysterical quality of the American Revolution thirteen years before? It was theoretically based on exactly the same

[1] Sénac de Meilhan, *Du Gouvernement en France*, 129, etc. (1795).

[2] *Travels in France*, i. 603.

doctrine. Jefferson and Franklin were as well disciplined in the French philosophy of the eighteenth century as Mirabeau or Robespierre. The Declaration of Independence recites the same abstract and unhistoric propositions as the Declaration of the Rights of Man. Why are we to describe the draught which Rousseau and the others had brewed, as a harmless or wholesome prescription for the Americans, and as maddening poison to the French? The answer must be that the quality of the drug is relative to the condition of the patient, and that the vital question for the student of the old régime and the circumstances of its fall, is what other drug, what better process, could have extricated France on more tranquil terms from her desperate case. The American colonists, in spite of the over-wide formulæ of their Declaration, really never broke with their past in any of its fundamental elements. They had a historic basis of laws and institutions which was still sound and whole, and the political severance from England made no breach in social continuity. If a different result followed in France, it was not because France was the land of the classic spirit, but because her institutions were inadequate, and her ruling classes incompetent to transform them.

M. Taine's figure of the man who drains the poisonous draught, as having been previously 'a little weak in constitution, but still sound and of peaceful habits,' is entirely delusive. The whole evidence shows that France was not sound, but the very reverse of sound, and no inconsiderable portion of that evidence is to be found in the facts which M. Taine has so industriously collected in his own book. The description of France as a little weak in constitution, but still sound and of peaceful habits, is the more surprising to us because M. Taine himself had in an earlier page (p. 109), when summing up the results of Privilege, ended with these emphatic

words: 'Déjà avant l'écroulement final, la France est dissoute, et elle est dissoute parce que les privilégiés ont oublié leur caractère d'hommes publics.' But then is not this rather more than being only a little weak in constitution, and still sound?

ROBESPIERRE.

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I.

A FRENCH writer has recently published a careful and interesting volume on the famous events which ended in the overthrow of Robespierre and the close of the Reign of Terror.[1] These events are known in the historic calendar as the Revolution of Thermidor in the Year II. After the fall of the monarchy, the Convention decided that the year should begin with the autumnal equinox, and that the enumeration should date from the birth of the Republic. The Year I. opens on September 22, 1792; the Year II. opens on the same day of 1793. The month of Thermidor begins on July 19. The memorable Ninth Thermidor therefore corresponds to July 27, 1794. This has commonly been taken as the date of the commencement of a counter-revolution, and in one sense it was so. Comte, however, and others have preferred to fix the reaction at the execution of Danton (April 5, 1794), or Robespierre's official proclamation of Deism in the Festival of the Supreme Being (May 7, 1794).

M. D'Héricault does not belong to the school of writers who treat the course of history as a great high road, following a firmly traced line, and set with plain and ineffaceable landmarks. The French Revolution has nearly always been handled in this way, alike by those who think it fruitful in blessings, and by their adversaries who pronounce it a curse

[1] *La Révolution de Thermidor.* Par Ch. D'Héricault. Paris: Didier, 1876.

inflicted by the wrath of Heaven. Historians have looked at the Revolution as a plain landsman looks at the sea. To the landsman the ocean seems one huge immeasurable flood, obeying a simple law of ebb and flow, and offering to the navigator a single uniform force. Yet in truth we know that the oceanic movement is the product of many forces; the seeming uniformity covers the energy of a hundred currents and counter-currents; the sea-floor is not even nor the same, but is subject to untold conditions of elevation and subsidence; the sea is not one mass, but many masses moving along definite lines of their own. It is the same with the great tides of history. Wise men shrink from summing them up in single propositions. That the French Revolution led to an immense augmentation of happiness, both for the French and for mankind, can only be denied by the Pope. That it secured its beneficent results untempered by any mixture of evil, can only be maintained by men as mad as Doctor Pangloss. The Greek poetess Corinna said to the youthful Pindar, when he had interwoven all the gods and goddesses in the Theban mythology into a single hymn, that we should sow with the hand and not with the sack. Corinna's monition to the singer is proper to the interpreter of historical truth: he should cull with the hand, and not sweep in with the scythe. It is doubtless mere pedantry to abstain from the widest conception of the sum of a great movement. A clear, definite, and stable idea of the meaning in the history of human progress of such vast groups of events as the Reformation or the Revolution, is indispensable for any one to whom history is a serious study of society. It is just as important, however, not to forget that they were really groups of events, and not in either case a single uniform movement. The World-Epos is after all only a file of the morning paper in a state of glorification. A sensible

man learns, in everyday life, to abstain from praising and blaming character by wholesale; he becomes content to say of this trait that it is good, and of that act that it was bad. So in history, we become unwilling to join or to admire those who insist upon transferring their sentiment upon the whole to their judgment upon each part. We seek to be allowed to retain a decided opinion as to the final value to mankind of a long series of transactions, and yet not to commit ourselves to set the same estimate on each transaction in particular, still less on each person associated with it. Why shall we not prize the general results of the Reformation, without being obliged to defend John of Leyden and the Munster Anabaptists?

M. D'Héricault's volume naturally suggests such reflections as these. Of all the men of the Revolution, Robespierre has suffered most from the audacious idolatry of some writers, and the splenetic impatience of others. M. Louis Blanc and M. Ernest Hamel talk of him as an angel or a prophet, and the Ninth Thermidor is a red day indeed in their martyrology. Michelet and M. D'Héricault treat him as a mixture of Cagliostro and Caligula, both a charlatan and a miscreant. We are reminded of the commencement of an address of the French Senate to the first Bonaparte: 'Sire,' they began, 'the desire for perfection is one of the worst maladies that can afflict the human mind.' This bold aphorism touches one of the roots of the judgments we pass both upon men and events. It is because people so irrationally think fit to insist upon perfection, that Robespierre's admirers would fain deny that he ever had a fault, and the tacit adoption of the same impracticable standard makes it easier for Robespierre's wholesale detractors to deny that he had a single virtue or performed a single service. The point of view is essentially unfit for history. The real subject of history is the improvement of social

arrangements, and no conspicuous actor in public affairs since the world began saw the true direction of improvement with an absolutely unerring eye from the beginning of his career to the end. It is folly for the historian, as it is for the statesman, to strain after the imaginative unity of the dramatic creator. Social progress is an affair of many small pieces and slow accretions, and the interest of historic study lies in tracing, amid the immense turmoil of events and through the confusion of voices, the devious course of the sacred torch, as it shifts from bearer to bearer. And it is not the bearers who are most interesting, but the torch.

In the old Flemish town of Arras, known in the diplomatic history of the fifteenth century by a couple of important treaties, and famous in the industrial history of the Middle Ages for its pre-eminence in the manufacture of the most splendid kind of tapestry hangings, Maximilian Robespierre was born in May, 1759. He was therefore no more than five and thirty years old, when he came to his ghastly end in 1794. His father was a lawyer, and, though the surname of the family had the prefix of nobility, they belonged to the middle class. When this decorative prefix became dangerous, Maximilian Derobespierre dropped it. His great rival, Danton, was less prudent or less fortunate, and one of the charges made against him was that he had styled himself Monsieur D'Anton.

Robespierre's youth was embittered by sharp misfortune. His mother died when he was only seven years old, and his father had so little courage under the blow, that he threw up his practice, deserted his children, and died in purposeless wanderings through Germany. The burden that the weak and selfish throw down, must be taken up by the brave. Friendly kinsfolk charged themselves with the maintenance of the four

orphans. Maximilian was sent to the school of the town, whence he proceeded with a sizarship to the college of Louis-le-Grand in Paris. He was an apt and studious pupil, but austere, and disposed to that sombre cast of spirits which is common enough where a lad of some sensibility and much self-esteem finds himself stamped with a badge of social inferiority. Robespierre's worshippers love to dwell on his fondness for birds: with the universal passion of mankind for legends of the saints, they tell how the untimely death of a favourite pigeon afflicted him with anguish so poignant, that, even sixty long years after, it made his sister's heart ache to look back upon the pain of that tragic moment. Always a sentimentalist, Robespierre was from boyhood a devout enthusiast for the great high priest of the sentimental tribe. Rousseau was then passing the last squalid days of his life among the meadows and woods at Ermenonville. Robespierre, who could not have been more than twenty at the time, for Rousseau died in the summer of 1778, is said to have gone on a reverential pilgrimage in search of an oracle from the lonely sage, as Boswell and as Gibbon and a hundred others had gone before him. Rousseau was wont to use his real adorers as ill as he used his imaginary enemies. Robespierre may well have shared the discouragement of the enthusiastic father who informed Rousseau that he was about to bring up his son on the principles of *Emilius*. 'Then so much the worse,' cried the perverse philosopher, 'both for you and your son.' If he had been endowed with second sight, he would have thought at least as rude a presage due to this last and most ill-starred of a whole generation of neophytes.

In 1781 Robespierre returned to Arras, and amid the welcome of his relatives and the good hopes of friends began the practice of an advocate. For eight years he led an active

and seemly life. He was not wholly pure from that indiscretion of the young appetite, about which the world is mute, but whose better ordering and governance would give a diviner brightness to the earth. Still, if he did not escape the ordeal of youth, Robespierre was frugal, laborious, and persevering. His domestic amiability made him the delight of his sister, and his zealous self-sacrifice for the education and advancement in life of his younger brother was afterwards repaid by Augustin Robespierre's devotion through all the fierce and horrible hours of Thermidor. Though cold in temperament, extremely reserved in manners, and fond of industrious seclusion, Robespierre did not disdain the social diversions of the town. He was a member of a reunion of Rosati, who sang madrigals and admired one another's bad verses. Those who love the ironical surprises of fate, may picture the young man who was doomed to play so terrible a part in terrible affairs, going through the harmless follies of a ceremonial reception by the Rosati, taking three deep breaths over a rose, solemnly fastening the emblem to his coat, emptying a glass of rose-red wine at a draught to the good health of the company, and finally reciting couplets that Voltaire would have found almost as detestable as the Law of Prairial or the Festival of the Supreme Being. More laudable efforts of ambition were prize essays, in which Robespierre has the merit of taking the right side in important questions. He protested against the inhumanity of laws that inflicted civil infamy upon the innocent family of a convicted criminal. And he protested against the still more horrid cruelty which reduced unfortunate children born out of wedlock to something like the status of the mediæval serf. Robespierre's compositions at this time do not rise above the ordinary level of declaiming mediocrity, but they promised a manhood of benignity and enlightenment.

To compose prize essays on political reforms was better than to ignore or to oppose political reform. But the course of events afterwards owed their least desirable bias to the fact that such compositions were the nearest approach to political training that so many of the revolutionary leaders underwent. One is inclined to apply to practical politics Arthur Young's sensible remark about the endeavour of the French to improve the quality of their wool: 'A cultivator at the head of a sheep-farm of 3000 or 4000 acres, would in a few years do more for their wools than all the academicians and philosophers will effect in ten centuries.'

In his profession he distinguished himself in one or two causes of local celebrity. An innovating citizen had been ordered by the authorities to remove a lightning-conductor from his house within three days, as being a mischievous practical paradox, as well as a danger and an annoyance to his neighbours. Robespierre pleaded the innovator's case on appeal, and won it. He defended a poor woman who had been wrongfully accused by a monk belonging to the powerful corporation of a great neighbouring abbey. The young advocate did not even shrink from manfully arguing a case against the august Bishop of Arras himself. His independence did him no harm. The Bishop afterwards appointed him to the post of judge or legal assessor in the episcopal court. This tribunal was a remnant of what had once been the sovereign authority and jurisdiction of the Bishops of Arras. That a court with the power of life and death should thus exist by the side of a proper corporation of civil magistrates, is an illustration of the inextricable labyrinth of the French law and its administration on the eve of the Revolution. Robespierre did not hold his office long. Every one has heard the striking story, how the young judge, whose name was within half a dozen years to

take a place in the popular mind of France and of Europe with the bloodiest monsters of myth or history, resigned his post in a fit of remorse after condemning a murderer to be executed. 'He is a criminal, no doubt,' Robespierre kept groaning in reply to the consolations of his sister, for women are more positive creatures than men: 'a criminal, no doubt; but to put a man to death!' Many a man thus begins the great voyage with queasy sensibilities, and ends it a cannibal.

Among Robespierre's associates in the festive mummeries of the Rosati was a young officer of Engineers, who was destined to be his colleague in the dread Committee of Public Safety, and to leave an important name in French history. In the garrison of Arras, Carnot was quartered,—that iron head, whose genius for the administrative organization of war achieved even greater things for the new republic than the genius of Louvois had achieved for the old monarchy. Carnot surpassed not only Louvois, but perhaps all other names save one in modern military history, by uniting to the most powerful gifts for organization, both the strategic talent that planned the momentous campaign of 1794, and the splendid personal energy and skill that prolonged the defence of Antwerp against the allied army in 1814. Partisans dream of the unrivalled future of peace, glory, and freedom that would have fallen to the lot of France, if only the gods had brought about a hearty union between the military genius of Carnot and the political genius of Robespierre. So, no doubt, after the restoration of Charles II. in England, there were good men who thought that all would have gone very differently, if only the genius of the great creator of the Ironsides had taken counsel with the genius of Venner, the Fifth-Monarchy Man, and Feak, the Anabaptist prophet.

The time was now come when such men as Robespierre were to be tried with fire, when they were to drink the cup of fury and the dregs of the cup of trembling. Sybils and prophets have already spoken their inexorable decree, as Goethe has said, on the day that first gives the man to the world; no time and no might can break the stamped mould of his character; only as life wears on, do all its aforeshapen lines come into light. He is launched into a sea of external conditions, that are as independent of his own will as the temperament with which he confronts them. It is action that tries, and variation of circumstance. The leaden chains of use bind many an ugly unsuspected prisoner in the soul; and when the habit of their lives has been sundered, the most immaculate are capable of antics beyond prevision. A great crisis of the world was prepared for Robespierre and those others, his allies or his destroyers, who with him came like the lightning and went like the wind.

At the end of 1788 the King of France found himself forced to summon the States General. It was their first assembly since 1614. On the memorable Fourth of May, 1789, Robespierre appeared at Versailles as one of the representatives of the third estate of his native province of Artois. The excitement and enthusiasm of the elections to this renowned assembly, the immense demands and boundless expectations that they disclosed, would have warned a cool observer of events, if in that heated air a cool observer could have been found, that the hour had struck for the fulfilment of those grim apprehensions of revolution that had risen in the minds of many shrewd men, good and bad, in the course of the previous half-century. No great event in history ever comes wholly unforeseen. The antecedent causes are so wide-reaching, many, and continuous, that their direction is always sure to

strike the eye of one or more observers in all its significance. Lewis the Fifteenth, whose invincible weariness and heavy disgust veiled a penetrating discernment, measured accurately the scope of the conflict between the crown and the parlements: but, said he, things as they are will last my time. Under the roof of his own palace at Versailles, in the apartment of Madame de Pompadour's famous physician, one of Quesnai's economic disciples had cried out, 'The realm is in a sore way; it will never be cured without a great internal commotion; but woe to those who have to do with it; into such work the French go with no slack hand.' Rousseau, in a passage in the Confessions, not only divines a speedy convulsion, but with striking practical sagacity enumerates the political and social causes that were unavoidably drawing France to the edge of the abyss. Lord Chesterfield, so different a man from Rousseau, declared as early as 1752, that he saw in France every symptom that history had taught him to regard as the forerunner of deep change; before the end of the century, so his prediction ran, both the trade of king and the trade of priest in France would be shorn of half their glory. D'Argenson in the same year declared a revolution inevitable, and with a curious precision of anticipation assured himself that if once the necessity arose of convoking the States General, they would not assemble in vain: *qu'on y prenne garde! ils seraient fort sérieux!* Oliver Goldsmith, idly wandering through France, towards 1755, discerned in the mutinous attitude of the judicial corporations, that the genius of freedom was entering the kingdom in disguise, and that a succession of three weak monarchs would end in the emancipation of the people of France. The most touching of all these presentiments is to be found in a private letter of the great Empress, the mother of Marie Antoinette herself. Maria Theresa describes the

ruined state of the French monarchy, and only prays that if it be doomed to ruin still more utter, at least the blame may not fall upon her daughter. The Empress had not learnt that when the giants of social force are advancing from the sombre shadow of the past, with the thunder and the hurricane in their hands, our poor prayers are of no more avail than the unbodied visions of a dream.

The old popular assembly of the realm was not resorted to before every means of dispensing with so drastic a remedy had been tried. Historians sometimes write as if Turgot were the only able and reforming minister of the century. God forbid that we should put any other minister on a level with that high and beneficent figure. But Turgot was not the first statesman, both able and patriotic, who had been disgraced for want of compliance with the conditions of success at court; he was only the last of a series. Chauvelin, a man of vigour and capacity, was dismissed with ignominy in 1736. Machault, a reformer, at once courageous and wise, shared the same fate twenty years later; and in his case revolution was as cruel and as heedless as reaction, for, at the age of ninety-one, the old man was dragged, blind and deaf, before the revolutionary tribunal and thence dispatched to the guillotine. Between Chauvelin and Machault, the elder D'Argenson, who was greater than either of them, had been raised to power, and then speedily hurled down from it (1747), for no better reason than that his manners were uncouth, and that he would not waste his time in frivolities that were as the breath of life in the great gallery at Versailles and on the smooth-shaven lawns of Fontainebleau.

Not only had wise counsellors been tried; consultative assemblies had been tried also. Necker had been dismissed in 1781, after publishing the memorable Report which first

initiated the nation in the elements of financial knowledge. The disorder waxed greater, and the monarchy drew nearer to bankruptcy each year. The only modern parallel to the state of things in France under Lewis the Sixteenth is to be sought in the state of things in Egypt or in Turkey. Lewis the Fourteenth had left a debt of between two and three thousand millions of livres, but this had been wiped out by the heroic operations of Law; operations, by the way, which have never yet been scientifically criticised. But the debt soon grew again, by foolish wars, by the prodigality of the court, and by the rapacity of the nobles. It amounted in 1789 to something like two hundred and forty millions sterling; and it is interesting to notice that this was exactly the sum of the public debt of Great Britain at the same time. The year's excess of expenditure over receipts in 1774, was about fifty millions of livres: in 1787 it was one hundred and forty millions, or according to a different computation even two hundred millions. The material case was not at all desperate, if only the court had been less infatuated, and the spirit of the privileged orders had been less blind and less vile. The fatality of the situation lay in the characters of a handful of men and women. For France was abundant in resources, and even at this moment was far from unprosperous, in spite of the incredible trammels of law and custom. An able financier, with the support of a popular chamber and the assent of the sovereign, could have had no difficulty in restoring the public credit. But the conditions, simple as they might seem to a patriot or to posterity, were unattainable so long as power remained with a caste that were anything we please except patriots. An Assembly of Notables was brought together, but it was only the empty phantasm of national representation. Yet the situation was so serious that even this body, of arbitrary origin as it was, still

was willing to accept vital reforms. The privileged order, who were then as their descendants are now, the worst conservative party in Europe, immediately persuaded the magisterial corporation to resist the Notables. The judicial corporation or Parlement of Paris had been suppressed under Lewis the Fifteenth, and unfortunately revived again at the accession of his grandson. By the inconvenient constitution of the French government, the assent of that body was indispensable to fiscal legislation, on the ground that such legislation was part of the general police of the realm. The king's minister, now Loménie de Brienne, devised a new judicial constitution. But the churchmen, the nobles, and the lawyers, all united in protestations against such a blow. The common people are not always the best judges of a remedy for the evils under which they are the greatest sufferers, and they broke out in disorder both in Paris and the provinces. They discerned an attack upon their local independence. Nobody would accept office in the new courts, and the administration of justice was at a standstill. A loan was thrown upon the market, but the public could not be persuaded to take it up. It was impossible to collect the taxes. The interest on the national debt was unpaid, and the fundholder was dismayed and exasperated by an announcement that only two-fifths would be discharged in cash. A very large part of the national debt was held in the form of annuities for lives, and men who had invested their savings on the credit of the government, saw themselves left without a provision. The total number of fundholders cannot be ascertained with any precision, but it must have been very considerable, especially in Paris and the other great cities. Add to these all the civil litigants in the kingdom, who had portions of their property virtually sequestrated by the suspension of the courts into which the property had been taken. The

resentment of this immense body of defrauded public creditors and injured private suitors explains the alienation of the middle class from the monarchy. In the convulsions of our own time, the moneyed interests have been on one side, and the population without money on the other. But in the first and greatest convulsion, those who had nothing to lose found their animosities shared by those who had had something to lose, and had lost it.

Deliberative assemblies, then, had been tried, and ministers had been tried; both had failed, and there was no other device left, except one which was destructive to absolute monarchy. Lewis the Sixteenth was in 1789 in much the same case as that of the King of England in 1640. Charles had done his best to raise money without any parliament for twelve years: he had lost patience with the Short Parliament; finally, he was driven without choice or alternative to face as he best could the stout resolution and the wise patriotism of the Long Parliament. Men sometimes wonder how it was that Lewis, when he came to find the National Assembly unmanageable, and discovering how rapidly he was drifting towards the thunders of the revolutionary cataract, did not break up a Chamber over which neither the court, nor even a minister so popular as Necker, had the least control. It is a question whether the sword would not have broken in his hand. Even supposing, however, that the army would have consented to a violent movement against the Assembly, the king would still have been left in the same desperate straits from which he had looked to the States General to extricate him. He might perhaps have dispersed the Assembly; he could not disperse debt and deficit. Those monsters would have haunted him as implacably as ever. There was no new formula of exorcism, nor any untried enchantment. The success of violent designs

against the National Assembly, had success been possible, could, after all, have been followed by no other consummation than the relapse of France into the raging anarchy of Poland, or the sullen decrepitude of Turkey.

This will seem to some persons no better then fatalism. But, in truth, there are two popular ways of reading the history of events between 1789 and 1794, and each of them seems to us as bad as the other. According to one, whatever happened in the Revolution was good and admirable, because it happened. According to the other, something good and admirable was always attainable, and, if only bad men had not interposed, always ready to happen. Of course, the only sensible view is that many of the revolutionary solutions were detestable, but no other solution was within reach. This is undoubtedly the best of possible worlds; if the best is not so good as we could wish, that is the fault of the possibilities. Such a doctrine is neither fatalism nor optimism, but an honest recognition of long chains of cause and effect in human affairs.

The great gathering of chosen men was first called States General; then it called itself National Assembly; it is commonly known in history as the Constituent Assembly. The name is of ironical association, for the constitution which it framed after much travail, endured for no more than a few months. Its deliberations lasted from May, 1789, until September, 1791. Among its members were three principal groups. There was, first, a band of blind adherents of the old system of government with all or most of its abuses. Second, there was a Centre of timid and one-eyed men, who were for transforming the old absolutist system into something that should resemble the constitution of our own country. Finally, there was a Left, with some differences of shade, but all agreeing in the necessity of a thorough re-modelling of every

institution and most of the usages of the country. 'Silence, you thirty votes!' cried Mirabeau one day, when he was interrupted by the dissents of the Mountain. This was the original measure of the party that in the twinkling of an eye was to wield the destinies of France. In our own time we have wondered at the rapidity with which a Chamber that was one day on the point of bringing back the grand-nephew of Lewis the Sixteenth, found itself a little later voting that Republic which has since been ratified by the nation, and has at this moment the ardent good wishes of every enlightened politician in Europe. In the same way it is startling to think that within three years of the beheading of Lewis the Sixteenth, there was probably not one serious republican in the representative assembly of France. Yet it is always so. We might make just the same remark of the House of Commons at Westminster in 1640, and of the Assembly of Massachusetts or of New York as late as 1770. The final flash of a long unconscious train of thought or intent is ever a surprise and a shock. It is a mistake to set these swift changes down to political levity; they were due rather to quickness of political intuition. It was the king's attempt at flight in the summer of 1791 that first created a republican party. It was that unhappy exploit, and no theoretical preferences, that awoke France to the necessity of choosing between the sacrifice of monarchy and the restoration of territorial aristocracy.

Political intuition was never one of Robespierre's conspicuous gifts. But he had a doctrine that for a certain time served the same purpose. Rousseau had kindled in him a fervid democratic enthusiasm, and had penetrated his mind with the principle of the Sovereignty of the People. This famous dogma contained implicitly within it the more indisputable truth that a society ought to be regulated with a view

to the happiness of the people. Such a principle made it easier for Robespierre to interpret rightly the first phases of the revolutionary movement. It helped him to discern that the concentrated physical force of the populace was the only sure protection against a civil war. And if a civil war had broken out in 1789, instead of 1793, all the advantages of authority would have been against the popular party. The first insurrection of Paris is associated with the harangue of Camille Desmoulins at the Palais Royal, with the fall of the Bastille, with the murder of the governor, and a hundred other scenes of melodramatic horror and the blood-red picturesque. The insurrection of the Fourteenth of July, 1789, taught Robespierre a lesson of practical politics, which exactly fitted in with his previous theories. In his resentment against the oppressive disorder of monarchy and feudalism, he had accepted the counter principle that the people can do no wrong, and nobody of sense now doubts that in their first great act the people of Paris did what was right. Six days after the fall of the Bastille, the Centre were for issuing a proclamation denouncing popular violence and ordering rigorous vigilance. Robespierre was then so little known in the Assembly that even his name was usually misspelt in the journals. From his obscure bench on the Mountain he cried out with bitter vehemence against the proposed proclamation:—'Revolt! But this revolt is liberty. The battle is not at its end. To-morrow, it may be, the shameful designs against us will be renewed; and who will there then be to repulse them, if beforehand we declare the very men to be rebels, who have rushed to arms for our protection and safety?' This was the cardinal truth of the situation. Everybody knows Mirabeau's saying about Robespierre:—'That man will go far: he believes every word that he says!' This is much, but it is only half. It is not only

that the man of power believes what he says; what he believes must fit in with the facts and with the demands of the time. Now Robespierre's firmness of conviction happened at this stage to be rightly matched by his clearness of sight.

It is true that a passionate mob, its unearthly admixture of laughter with fury, of vacancy with deadly concentration, is as terrible as some uncouth antediluvian, or the unfamiliar monsters of the sea, or one of the giant plants that make men shudder with mysterious fear. The history of our own country in the eighteenth century tells of the riots against meeting-houses in Doctor Sacheverell's time, and the riots against papists and their abettors in Lord George Gordon's time, and Church-and-King riots in Doctor Priestley's time. It would be too daring, therefore, to maintain that the rabble of the poor have any more unerring political judgment than the rabble of the opulent. But, in France in 1789, Robespierre was justified in saying that revolt meant liberty. If there had been no revolt in July, the court party would have had time to mature their infatuated designs of violence against the Assembly. In October these designs had come to life again. The royalists at Versailles had exultant banquets, at which, in the presence of the Queen, they drank confusion to all patriots, and trampled the new emblem of freedom passionately underfoot. The news of this odious folly soon travelled to Paris. Its significance was speedily understood by a populace whose wits were sharpened by famine. Thousands of fire-eyed women and men tramped intrepidly out towards Versailles. If they had done less, the Assembly would have been dispersed or arbitrarily decimated, even though such a measure would certainly have left the government in desperation.

At that dreadful moment of the Sixth of October, amid the slaughter of guards and the frantic yells of hatred against

the Queen, it is no wonder that some were found to urge the King to flee to Metz. If he had accepted the advice, the course of the Revolution would have been different; but its march would have been just as irresistible, for revolution lay in the force of a hundred combined circumstances. Lewis, however, rejected these counsels, and suffered the mob to carry him in bewildering procession to his capital and his prison. That great man who was watching French affairs with such consuming eagerness from distant Beaconsfield in our English Buckinghamshire, instantly divined that this procession from Versailles to the Tuileries marked the fall of the monarchy. 'A revolution in sentiment, manners, and moral opinions, the most important of all revolutions in a word,' was in Burke's judgment to be dated from the Sixth of October, 1789.

The events of that day did, indeed, give its definite cast to the situation. The moral authority of the sovereign came to an end, along with the ancient and reverend mystery of the inviolability of his person. The Count d'Artois, the king's second brother, one of the most worthless of human beings, as incurably addicted to sinister and suicidal counsels in 1789 as he was when he overthrew his own throne forty years later, had run away from peril and from duty after the insurrection of July. After the insurrection of October, a troop of the nobles of the court followed him. The personal cowardice of the Emigrants was only matched by their political blindness. Many of the most unwise measures in the assembly were only passed by small majorities, and the majorities would have been transformed into minorities, if in the early days of the Revolution these unworthy men had only stood firm at their posts. Selfish oligarchies have scarcely ever been wanting in courage. The emigrant noblesse of France are almost the only instance of a great privileged and territorial caste that had as little

bravery as they had patriotism. The explanation is that they had been an oligarchy, not of power or duty, but of self-indulgence. They were crushed by Richelieu to secure the unity of the monarchy. They now effaced themselves at the Revolution, and this secured that far greater object, the unity of the nation.

The disappearance of so many of the nobles from France was not the only abdication on the part of the conservative powers. Cowed and terrified by the events of October, no less than three hundred members of the Assembly sought to resign. The average attendance even at the most important sittings was often incredibly small. Thus the Chamber came to have little more moral authority in face of the people of Paris, than had the King himself. The people of Paris had themselves become in a day the masters of France.

This immense change led gradually to a decisive alteration in the position of Robespierre. He found the situation of affairs at last falling into perfect harmony with his doctrine. Rousseau had taught him that the people ought to be sovereign, and now the people were being recognized as sovereign *de facto* no less than *de jure*. Any limitations on the new divine right united the horror of blasphemy to the secular wickedness of political treason. After the Assembly had come to Paris, a famishing mob in a moment of mad fury murdered an unfortunate baker, who was suspected of keeping back bread. These paroxysms led to the enactment of a new martial law. Robespierre spoke vehemently against it; such a law implied a wrongful distrust of the people. Then discussions followed as to the property qualification of an elector. Citizens were classed as active and passive. Only those were to have votes, who paid direct taxes to the amount of three days' wages in the year. Robespierre flung himself upon this

too famous distinction with bitter tenacity. If all men are equal, he cried, then all men ought to have votes: if he who only pays the amount of one day's work, has fewer rights than another who pays the amount of three days, why should not the man who pays ten days, have more rights than the other who only pays the earnings of three days? This kind of reasoning had little weight with the Chamber, but it made the reasoner very popular with the throng in the galleries. Even within the Assembly, influence gradually came to the man who had a parcel of immutable axioms and postulates, and who was ready with a deduction and a phrase for each case as it arose. He began to stand out like a needle of sharp rock, amid the flitting shadows of uncertain purpose and the vapoury drift of wandering aims.

Robespierre had no social conception, and he had nothing which can be described as a policy. He was the prophet of a sect, and had at this period none of the aims of the chief of a political party. What he had was democratic doctrine, and an intrepid logic. And Robespierre's intrepid logic was the nearest approach to calm force and coherent character that the first three years of the Revolution brought into prominence. When the Assembly met, Necker was the popular idol. Almost within a few weeks, this well-meaning but very incompetent divinity had slipped from his throne, and Lafayette had taken his place. Mirabeau came next. The ardent and animated genius of his eloquence fitted him above all men to ride the whirlwind and direct the storm. And on the memorable Twenty-third of June, '89, he had shown the genuine audacity and resource of a revolutionary statesman, when he stirred the Chamber to defy the King's demand, and hailed the royal usher with the resounding words:—'You, sir, have neither place nor right of speech. Go tell those who sent you that we are

here by the will of the people, and only bayonets shall drive us hence!' But Mirabeau bore a tainted character, and was always distrusted. 'Ah, how the immorality of my youth,' he used to say, in words that sum up the tragedy of many a puissant life, 'how the immorality of my youth hinders the public good!' The event proved that the popular suspicion was just: the patriot is now no longer merely suspected, but known, to have sullied his hands with the money of the court. He did not sell himself, it has been said; he allowed himself to be paid. The distinction was too subtle for men doing battle for their lives and for freedom, and Mirabeau's popularity waned towards the middle of 1790. The next favourite was Barnave, the generous and high-minded spokesman of those sanguine spirits who to the very end hoped against hope to save both the throne and its occupant. By the spring of 1791 Barnave followed his predecessors into disfavour. The Assembly was engaged on the burning question of the government of the colonies. Were the negro slaves to be admitted to citizenship, or was a legislature of planters to be entrusted with the task of social reformation? Our own generation has seen in the republic of the West what strife this political difficulty is capable of raising. Barnave pronounced against the negroes. Robespierre, on the contrary, declaimed against any limitation of the right of the negro, as a compromise with the avarice, pride, and cruelty of a governing race, and a guilty trafficking with the rights of man. Barnave from that day saw that his laurel crown had gone to Robespierre.

If the people 'called him noble that was now their hate, him vile that was their garland,' they did not transfer their affections without sound reason. Barnave's sensibility was too easily touched. There are many politicians in every epoch whose principles grow slack and flaccid at the approach of the

golden sun of royalty. Barnave was one of those who was sent to bring back the fugitive king and queen from Varennes, and the journey by their side in the coach unstrung his spirit. He became one of the court's clandestine advisers. Men of this weak susceptibility of imagination are not fit for times of revolution. To be on the side of the court was to betray the cause of the nation. We cannot take too much pains to realize that the voluntary conversion of Lewis the Sixteenth to a popular constitution and the abolition of feudalism, was practically as impossible as the conversion of Pope Pius the Ninth to the doctrine of a free church in a free state. Those who believe in the miracle of free will may think of this as they please. Sensible people who accept the scientific account of human character, know that the sudden transformation of a man or a woman brought up to middle age as the heir to centuries of absolutist tradition, into adherents of a government that agreed with the doctrines of Locke and Milton, was only possible on condition of supernatural interference. The king's good nature was no substitute for political capacity or insight. An instructive measure of the degree in which he possessed these two qualities may be found in that deplorable diary of his, where on such days as the Fourteenth of July, when the Bastille fell, and the Sixth of October, when he was carried in triumph from Versailles to the Tuileries, he made the simple entry, '*Rien.*' And he had no firmness. It was as difficult to keep the king to a purpose, La Marck said to Mirabeau, as to keep together a number of well-oiled ivory balls. Lewis, moreover, was guided by a more energetic and less compliant character than his own.

Marie Antoinette's high mien in adversity, and the contrast between the dazzling splendour of her first years and the scenes of outrage and bloody death that made the climax of

her fate, could not but strike the imaginations of men. Such contrasts are the very stuff of which Tragedy, the gorgeous muse with scepter'd pall, loves to weave her most imposing raiment. But history must be just; and the character of the Queen had far more concern in the disaster of the first five years of the Revolution, than had the character of Robespierre. Every new document that comes to light heaps up proof that if blind and obstinate choice of personal gratification before the common weal be enough to constitute a state criminal, then the Queen of France was one of the worst state criminals that ever afflicted a nation. The popular hatred of Marie Antoinette sprang from a sound instinct. We shall never know how much or how little truth there was in those frightful charges against her, that may still be read in a thousand pamphlets. These imputed depravities far surpass anything that John Knox ever said against Mary Stuart, or that Juvenal has recorded against Messalina; and, perhaps, for the only parallel we must look to the hideous stories of the Byzantine secretary against Theodora, the too famous empress of Justinian and the persecutor of Belisarius. We have to remember that all the revolutionary portraits are distorted by furious passion, and that Marie Antoinette may no more deserve to be compared to Mary Stuart, than Robespierre deserves to be compared to Ezzelino or to Alva. The aristocrats were the libellers, if libels they were. It is at least certain that, from the unlucky hour when the Austrian archduchess crossed the French frontier, a childish bride of fourteen, down to the hour when the Queen of France made the attempt to re-cross it in resentful flight one and twenty years afterwards, Marie Antoinette was ignorant, unteachable, blind to events and deaf to good counsels, a bitter grief to her heroic mother, the evil genius of her husband, the despair of her truest advisers, and an

exceedingly bad friend to the people of France. When Burke had that immortal vision of her at Versailles—'just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in, glittering like the morning star, full of life and splendour and joy'—we know from the correspondence between Maria Theresa and her minister at Versailles, that what Burke really saw was no divinity, but a flighty and troublesome schoolgirl, an accomplice in all the ignoble intrigues, and a sharer of all the small busy passions, that convulse the insects of a court. The levity that came with her Lorraine blood, broke out in incredible dissipations; in indiscreet visits to the masked balls at the opera, in midnight parades and mystifications on the terrace at Versailles, in insensate gambling. 'The court of France is turned into a gaming-hell,' said the Emperor Joseph, the Queen's own brother: 'if they do not amend, the revolution will be cruel.' These vices or follies were less mischievous than her intervention in affairs of state. Here her levity was as marked as in the paltry affairs of the boudoir and the ante-chamber, and here to levity she added both dissimulation and vindictiveness. It was the Queen's influence that procured the dismissal of the two virtuous ministers by whose aid the King was striving to arrest the decay of the government of his kingdom. Malesherbes was distasteful to her for no better reason than that she wanted his post for some favourite's favourite. Against Turgot she conspired with tenacious animosity, because he had suppressed a sinecure which she designed for a court parasite, and because he would not support her caprice on behalf of a worthless creature of her faction. These two admirable men were disgraced on the same day. The Queen wrote to her mother that she had not meddled in the affair. This was a falsehood, for she had even sought to have Turgot thrown into

the Bastille. 'I am as one dashed to the ground,' cried the great Voltaire, now nearing his end;—'Never can we console ourselves for having seen the golden age dawn and vanish. My eyes see only death in front of me, now that Turgot is gone. The rest of my days must be all bitterness.' What hope could there be that the personage who had thus put out the light of hope for France in 1776, would welcome that greater flame which was kindled in the land in 1789?

When people write hymns of pity for the Queen, we always recall the poor woman whom Arthur Young met, as he was walking up a hill to ease his horse near Mars-le-Tour. Though the unfortunate creature was only twenty-eight, she might have been taken for sixty or seventy, her figure was so bent, her face so furrowed and hardened by toil. Her husband, she said, had a morsel of land, one cow, and a poor little horse, yet he had to pay forty-two pounds of wheat and three chickens to one Seigneur, and one hundred and sixty pounds of oats, one chicken, and one franc to another, besides very heavy tailles and other taxes; and they had seven children. She had heard that 'something was to be done by some great folks for such poor ones, but she did not know who nor how, but God send us better, for the tailles and the dues grind us to the earth.' It was such hapless drudges as this who replenished the Queen's gaming tables at Versailles. Thousands of them dragged on the burden of their harassed and desperate days, less like men and women than beasts of the field wrung and tortured and mercilessly overladen, in order that the Queen might gratify her childish passion for diamonds, or lavish money and estates on worthless female Polignacs and Lamballes, or kill time at a post of five hundred louis a night at lansquenet and the faro bank. The Queen, it is true, was in all this no worse than other dissipated women then and since.

She did not realize that it was the system to which she had stubbornly committed herself, that drove the people of the fields to cut their crops green to be baked in the oven, because their hunger could not wait; or made them cower whole days in their beds, because misery seemed to gnaw them there with a duller fang. That she was unconscious of its effect, makes no difference in the real drift of her policy; makes no difference in the judgment that we ought to pass upon it, nor in the gratitude that is owed to the stern men who rose up to consume her and her court with righteous flame. The Queen and the courtiers, and the hard-faring woman of Mars-le-Tour, and that whole generation, have long been dust and shadow; they have vanished from the earth, as if they were no more than the fire-flies that the peasant of the Italian poet saw dancing in the vineyard, as he took his evening rest on the hill-side. They have all fled back into the impenetrable shade whence they came; our minds are free; and if social equity is not a chimera, Marie Antoinette was the protagonist of the most barbarous and execrable of causes.

Let us return to the shaping of the Constitution, not forgetting that its stability was to depend upon the Queen. Robespierre left some characteristic marks on the final arrangements. He imposed upon the Assembly a motion prohibiting any member of it from accepting office under the crown for a period of four years after the dissolution. Robespierre from this time forth constantly illustrated a very singular truth; namely, that the most ostentatious faith in humanity in general seems always to beget the sharpest distrust of all human beings in particular. He proceeded further in the same direction. It was Robespierre who persuaded the Chamber to pass a self-denying ordinance. All its members were

declared ineligible for a seat in the legislature that was to replace them. The members of the Right on this occasion went with their bitter foes of the Extreme Left, and to both parties have been imputed sinister and Machiavellian motives. The Right, aware that their own return to the new Assembly was impossible, were delighted to reduce the men with whom they had been carrying on incensed battle for two long years, to their own obscurity and impotence. Robespierre, on the other hand, is accused of a jealous desire to exclude Barnave from power. He is accused also of a deliberate intention to weaken the new legislature, in order to secure the preponderance of the Parisian clubs. There is no evidence that these malignant feelings were in Robespierre's mind. The reasons he gave were exactly of the kind that we should have expected to weigh with a man of his stamp. There is even a certain truth in them, that is not inconsistent with the experience of a parliamentary country like our own. To talk, he said, of the transmission of light and experience from one assembly to another, was to distrust the public spirit. The influence of opinion and the general good grows less, as the influence of parliamentary orators grows greater. He had no taste, he proceeded with one of his chilly sneers, for that new science which was styled the tactics of great assemblies; it was too like intrigue. Nothing but truth and reason ought to reign in a legislature. He did not like the idea of clever men becoming dominant by skilful tactics, and then perpetuating their empire from one assembly to another. He wound up his discourse with some theatrical talk about disinterestedness. When he sat down, he was greeted with enthusiastic acclamations, such as a few months before used to greet the stormful Mirabeau, now wrapped in eternal sleep amid the stillness of the new Pantheon. The folly of Robespierre's inferences is

obvious enough. If only truth and reason ought to weigh in a legislature, then it is all the more important not to exclude any body of men through whom truth and reason may possibly enter. Robespierre had striven hard to remove all restrictions from admission to the electoral franchise. He did not see that to limit the choice of candidates was in itself the most grievous of all restrictions.

The common view has been that the Constitution of 1791 perished because its creators were thus disabled from defending the work of their hands. This view led to a grave mistake four years later, after Robespierre had gone to his grave. The Convention, framing the Constitution of the Year III., decided that two-thirds of the existing assembly should keep their places, and that only one-third should be popularly elected. This led to the revolt of the Thirteenth Vendémiaire, and afterwards to the coup d'état of the Eighteenth Fructidor. In that sense, no doubt, Robespierre's proposal was the indirect root of much mischief. But it is childish to believe that if a hundred of the most prominent members of the Constituent had found seats in the new assembly, they would have saved the Constitution. Their experience, the loss of which it is the fashion to deplore, could have had no application to the strange combinations of untoward circumstance that were now rising up with such deadly rapidity in every quarter of the horizon, like vast sombre banks of impenetrable cloud. Prudence in new cases, as has been somewhere said, can do nothing on grounds of retrospect. The work of the Constituent was doomed by the very nature of things. Their assumption that the Revolution was made, while all France was still torn by fierce and unappeasable disputes as to seignorial rights, was one of the most striking pieces of self-deception in history. It is told how in the eleventh century, when the fervent hosts

of the Crusaders tramped across Europe on their way to deliver the Holy City from the hands of the unbelievers, the wearied children, as they espied each new town that lay in their interminable march, cried out with joyful expectation, 'Is not this, then, Jerusalem?' So France had set out on a portentous journey, little knowing how far off was the end; lightly taking each poor halting-place for the deeply longed-for goal; and waxing more fiercely disappointed, as each new height that they gained only disclosed yet further and more unattainable horizons. 'Alas,' said Burke, 'they little know how many a weary step is to be taken, before they can form themselves into a mass which has a true political personality.'

An immense revolution had been effected, but by what force were its fruits to be guarded? Each step in the revolution had raised a host of irreconcilable enemies. The rights of property, the old and jealous associations of local independence, the traditions of personal dignity, the relations of the civil to the spiritual power—these were the momentous matters about which the lawmakers of the Constituent had exercised themselves. The parties of the Chamber had for these two years past been laying mine and counter-mine among the very deepest foundations of society. One by one, each great corporation of the old order had been alienated from the new order. It was inevitable that it should be so. Let us look at one or two examples of this. The monarchy had imposed administrative centralization upon France without securing national unity. Thus the great provinces that had been slowly added one after the other to the monarchy, while becoming members of the same kingdom, still retained different institutions and isolated usages. The time was now come when France should be France, and its inhabitants Frenchmen, and no longer Bretons, Normans, Gascons, Provençals. The

Assembly by a single decree (1790) redivided the country into eighty-three departments. It wiped out at a stroke the separate administrations, the separate parlements, the peculiar privileges, and even the historic names of the old provinces. We need not dwell on the significance of this change here, but will only remark in passing that the stubborn disputes from the time of the Regency downwards between the crown and the provincial parlements turned, under other names and in other forms, upon this very issue of the unification of the law. The Crown was with the progressive party, but it lacked the strength and courage to set aside retrograde local sentiment, as the Constituent Assembly was able to set it aside.

Then this prodigious change in the distribution of government was accompanied by no less prodigious a change in the source of power. Popular election replaced the old system of territorial privilege and aristocratic prerogative. The effect of this vital innovation, followed as it was a few months later by a decree abolishing titles and armorial bearings, was to complete the estrangement of the old privileged classes from the revolutionary movement. All that they had meant to concede was the payment of an equal land tax. What was life worth to the noble, if common people were to be allowed to wear arms and to command a company of foot or a troop of horse; if he was no longer to have thousands of acres left waste for the chase; if he was compelled to sue for a vote where he had only yesterday reigned as manorial lord; if, in short, he was at a stroke to lose all those delights of insolence and vanity which had made, not the decoration, but the very substance, of his days?

Nor were the nobles of the sword and the red-heeled slipper the only outraged class. The magistracy of the provincial parliaments were inflamed with resentment against changes

that stripped them of the power of exciting against the new government the same factious and impracticable spirit with which they had on so many occasions embarrassed the old. The clergy were thrown even still more violently into opposition. The Assembly, sorely pressed for resources, declared the property held by ecclesiastics, amounting to a revenue of not less than eight million pounds sterling a year, or double that amount in modern values, to be the property of the nation. Talleyrand carried a measure decreeing the sale of the ecclesiastical domain. The clergy were as intensely irritated as laymen would have been by a similar assertion of sovereign right. And their irritation was made still more dangerous by the next set of measures against them.

The Assembly withdrew all recognition of Catholicism as the religion of the State; monastic vows were abolished, and orders and congregations suppressed; the ecclesiastical divisions were made to coincide with the civil divisions, a bishop being allotted to each department. What was a more important revolution than all, bishops and incumbents were henceforth to be appointed by popular election. The Assembly, who had always the institutions of our own country before them, meant to introduce into France the system of the Church of England, which was even then an anachronism in the land of its birth; much worse was such a system an anachronism, after belief had been sapped by a Voltaire and an Encyclopædia. The clergy both showed and excited a mutinous spirit. The Assembly, by way of retort, decreed that all ecclesiastics should take the oath of allegiance to the civil constitution of the clergy, on pain of forfeiture of their benefices. Five-sixths of the clergy refused, and the result was an outbreak of religious fury in the great towns of the south and elsewhere, which recalled the violence of the sixteenth century and the Reformation.

Thus when the Constituent Assembly ceased from its labours, the popular party had to face the mocking and defiant privileged classes; the magistracy, whose craft and calling were gone; and the clergy and as many of the flocks as shared the holy vindictiveness of their pastors. Immense material improvements had been made, but who was to guard them against all these powerful and exasperated bands? No chamber could execute so portentous an office, least of all a chamber that was bound to work in accord with a king, who at the very moment when he was swearing fidelity to the new order of things, was sending entreaties to the king of Prussia and to the Emperor, his brother-in-law, to overthrow the new order and bring back the old. If the Revolution had achieved priceless gains for France, they could only be preserved on condition that public action was directed by those who valued these gains for themselves and for their children above all things else—above the monarchy, above the constitution, above peace, above their own sorry lives. There was only one party who showed this passionate devotion, this fanatical resolution not to suffer the work that had been done to be undone, and never to allow France to sink back from exalted national life into the lethargy of national death. That party was the Jacobins, and, above all, the austere and rigorous Jacobins of Paris. On their ascendancy depended the triumph of the Revolution, and on the triumph of the Revolution depended the salvation of France. Their ascendancy meant a Jacobin dictatorship, and against this, as against dictatorship in all its forms, many things have been said, and truly said. But the one most important thing that can be said about Jacobin dictatorship is that, in spite of all the dolorous mishaps and hateful misdeeds that marked its course, it was still the only instrument capable of concentrating and utilising the dispersed social

energy of the French people. The crisis was not a crisis of logic but of force, and the Jacobins alone understood, as the old Covenanters had understood, that problems of force are not solved by phrases, but by mastery and the sword.

The great popular club of Paris was the centre of all those who looked at events in this spirit. The Legislative Assembly, the successor of the Constituent, met in the month of October, 1791. Like its predecessor, the Legislative contained a host of excellent and patriotic men, and they at once applied themselves to the all-important task, which the Constituent had left so deplorably incomplete, of finally breaking down the old feudal rights. The most important group in the new chamber were the deputies from the Gironde. Events soon revealed violent dissents between the Girondins and the Jacobins, but, for some months after the meeting of the Legislative, Girondins and Jacobins represented together in unbroken unity the great popular party. From this time until the fall of the monarchy, the whole of this popular party in all its branches found their rallying-place, not in the Assembly, but in the Jacobin Club; and the ascendancy of the Jacobin Club embodied the dictatorship of Paris. It was only from Paris that the whole circle of events could be commanded. When the peasants had got what they wanted, that is to say the emancipation of the land, they were ready to think that the Revolution was in safety and at an end. They were in no position to see the enmity of the exiles, the dangerous selfishness of Austria and Prussia, the disloyal machinations of the court, the reactionary sentiment of La Vendée, the absolute unworkableness of the new constitution. Arthur Young, in the height of the agitations of the Constituent Assembly, found himself at Moulins, the capital of the Bourbonnais, and on the great post-road to Italy. He went to the best coffee-house in

the town, and found as many as twenty tables spread for company, but as for a newspaper, he says he might as well have asked for an elephant. In the capital of a great province, the seat of an intendant, at a moment like that, with a National Assembly voting a revolution, and not a newspaper to tell the people whether Fayette, Mirabeau, or Lewis XVI. were on the throne! Could such a people as this, he cries, ever have made a revolution or become free? 'Never in a thousand centuries: the enlightened mob of Paris have done the whole.' And that was the plain truth. What was involved in such a truth, we shall see presently.

Robespierre had now risen to be one of the foremost men in France. To borrow the figure of an older chief of French faction, from trifling among the violins in the orchestra, he had ascended to the stage itself, and had a right to perform leading parts. Disqualified for sitting in the Assembly, he wielded greater power than ever in the Club. The Constituent had been full of his enemies. 'Alone with my own soul,' he once cried to the Jacobins, 'how could I have borne struggles that were beyond any human strength, if I had not raised my spirit to God?' This isolation marked him with a kind of theocratic distinction. These communings with the unseen powers gave a certain indefinable prerogative to a man, even among the children of the century of Voltaire. Condorcet, the youngest of the intimates and disciples of Voltaire, of D'Alembert, of Turgot, was the first to sound bitter warning that Robespierre was at heart a priest. The suggestion was more than a gibe. Priest is the mystagogue in office; his own authority is bound up with the prosperity and acceptance of his holy wares; he holds the necessity of an intervener and interpreter, and that intervener is himself; his spirit has no elasticity, no pliancy, no spaciousness; it stifles and is stifled.

Decidedly Robespierre had the sacerdotal temperament, its sense of personal importance, its thin unction, its private leanings to the stake and the cord; and he had one of those deplorable natures that seem as if they had never in their lives known the careless joys of a spring-time. By-and-by, from mere priest he developed into the deadlier carnivore, the Inquisitor.

The absence of advantages of bodily presence has never been fatal to the pretensions of the pontiff. Robespierre was only a couple of inches above five feet in height, but the Grand Monarch himself was hardly more. His eyes were small and weak, and he usually wore spectacles; his face was pitted by the marks of small-pox; his complexion was dull and sometimes livid; the tones of his voice were dry and shrill; and he spoke with the vulgar accent of his province. Such is the accepted tradition, and there is no reason to dissent from it. It is fair, however, to remember that Robespierre's enemies had command of his historic reputation at its source, and this is always a great advantage for faction, if not for truth. So Robespierre's voice and person may have been maligned, just as Aristophanes may have been a calumniator when he accused Cleon of having an intolerably loud voice and smelling of the tan-yard. What is certain is that Robespierre was a master of effective oratory adapted for a violent popular audience, to impress, to persuade, and to command. The Convention would have yawned, if it had not trembled under him, but the Jacobin Club never found him tedious. Robespierre's style had no richness either of feeling or of phrase; no fervid originality, no happy violences. If we turn from a page of Rousseau to a page of Robespierre, we feel that the disciple has none of the thrilling sonorousness of the master; the glow and the ardour have become metallic; the long-drawn plan-

gency is parodied by shrill notes of splenetic complaint. The rhythm has no broad wings; the phrases have no quality of radiance; the oratorical glimpses never lift the spirit into new worlds. We are never conscious of those great pulses of strong emotion that shake and vibrate through the nobly-measured periods of Cicero or Bossuet or Burke. Robespierre could not rival the vivid and highly-coloured declamation of Vergniaud; his speeches were never heated with the ardent passion that poured like a torrent of fire through some of the orations of Isnard; nor, above all, had he any mastery of that dialect of the Titans, by which Danton convulsed an audience with fear, with amazement, or with the spirit of defiant endeavour. The absence of these intenser qualities did not make Robespierre's speeches less effective for their own purpose. On the contrary, when the air has become torrid, and passionate utterance is cheap, then severity in form is very likely to pass for good sense in substance. That Robespierre had decent fluency, copiousness, and finish, need hardly be said. The French have an artistic sense; they have never accepted our own whimsical doctrine, that a man's politics must be sagacious, if his speaking is only clumsy enough. Robespierre more than once showed himself ready with a forcible reply on critical occasions: this only makes him an illustration the more of the good oratorical rule, that he is most likely to come well out of the emergency of an improvisation, who is usually most careful to prepare. Robespierre was as solicitous about the correctness of his speech, as he was about the neatness of his clothes; he no more grudged the pains given to the polishing of his discourses, than he grudged the time given every day to the powdering of his hair.

Nothing was more remarkable than his dexterity in presenting his case. James Mill used to point out to his son

among other skilful arts of Demosthenes, these two: first, that he said everything important to his purpose at the exact moment when he had brought the minds of his hearers into the state most fitted to receive it; second, that he insinuated gradually and indirectly into their minds ideas which would have roused opposition, if they had been expressed more directly. Mr. Mill once called the attention of the present writer to exactly the same kind of rhetorical skill in the speeches of Robespierre. The reader may do well to turn, for excellent specimens of this, to the speech of January 11, 1792, against the war, or that of May, 1794, against atheism. The logic is stringent, but the premisses are arbitrary. Robespierre is as one who should iterate indisputable propositions of abstract geometry and mechanics, while men are craving an architect who shall bridge the gulf of waters. Exuberance of high words no longer conceals the sterility of his ideas and the shallowness of his method. We should say of his speeches, as of so much of the speaking and writing of the time, that it is transparent and smooth, but there is none of that quality which the critics of painting call Texture.

His listeners, however, in the old refectory of the Convent of the Jacobins, took little heed of these things; the matter was too absorbing, the issue too vital. A hundred years before, the hunted Covenanters of the Western Lowlands, with Claverhouse's dragoons a few miles off, exulted in the endless exhortations and expositions of their hill preachers; they relished nothing so keenly as three hours of Mucklewrath, followed by three hours more of Peter Poundtext. We now find the jargon of the Mucklewraths and the Poundtexts of the Solemn League and Covenant, dead as it is, still not devoid of the picturesque and the impressive. If we cannot say the same of the great preacher of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, the reason

is partly that time has not yet softened the tones, and partly that there is no one in all the world with whom it is so difficult to sympathise, as with the narrower fanatics of our own particular faith.

We have still to mark the trait that above everything else gave to Robespierre the trust and confidence of Paris. As men listened to him, they had full faith in the integrity of the speaker. And Robespierre in one way deserved this confidence. He was eminently the possessor of a conscience. When the strain of circumstance in the last few months of his life pressed him towards wrong, at least before doing wrong he was forced to lie to his own conscience. This is a kind of honesty, as the world goes. In the Salon of 1791 an artist exhibited Robespierre's portrait, simply inscribing it, *The Incorruptible.* Throngs passed before it every day, and ratified the honourable designation by eager murmurs of approval. The democratic journals were loud in panegyric on the unsleeping sentinel of liberty. They loved to speak of him as the modern Fabricius, and delighted to recall the words of Pyrrhus, that it is easier to turn the sun from its course, than to turn Fabricius from the path of honour. Patriotic parents eagerly besought him to be sponsor for their children. Ladies of wealth, including at least one countrywoman of our own, vainly entreated him to accept their purses, for women are quick to recognize the temperament of the priest, and recognizing they adore. A rich widow of Nantes besought him with pertinacious tenderness to accept not only her purse but her hand. Mirabeau's sister hailed him as an eagle floating through the blue heavens.

Robespierre's life was frugal and simple, as must always be seemly in the spokesman of the dumb multitude whose lives are very hard. He had a single room in the house of Duplay, at the extreme west end of the long Rue Saint Honoré, half a

mile from the Jacobin Club, and less than that from the Riding School of the Tuileries, where the Constituent and Legislative Assemblies held session. His room, which served him for bed-chamber as well as for the uses of the day, was scantily furnished, and he shared the homely fare of his host. Duplay was a carpenter, a sworn follower of Robespierre, and the whole family cherished their guest as if he had been a son and a brother. Between him and the eldest daughter of the house there grew up a more tender sentiment, and Robespierre looked forward to the joys of the hearth, so soon as his country should be delivered from the oppressors without and the traitors within.

Eagerly as Robespierre delighted in his popularity, he intended it to be a force and not a decoration. An occasion of testing his influence arose in the winter of 1791. The situation had become more and more difficult. The court was more disloyal and more perverse, as its hopes that the nightmare would come to an end became fainter. In the summer of 1791, the German Emperor, the King of Prussia, and minor champions of retrograde causes issued the famous Declaration of Pilnitz. The menace of intervention was the one element needed to make the position of the monarchy desperate. It roused France to fever heat. For along with the foreign kings were the French princes of the blood and the French nobles. In the spring of 1792, the Assembly forced the king to declare war against Austria. Robespierre, in spite of the strong tide of warlike feeling, led the Jacobin opposition to the war. This is one of the most sagacious acts of his career, for the hazards of the conflict were terrible. If the foreigners and the emigrant nobles were victorious, all that the Revolution had won would be instantly and irretrievably lost. If, on the other hand, the French armies were victorious, one of two disasters might

follow. Either the troops might become a weapon in the hands of the court and the reactionary party, for the suppression of all the progressive parties alike; or else their general might make himself supreme. Robespierre divined, what the Girondins did not, that Narbonne and the court, in accepting the cry for war, were secretly designing, first, to crush the faction of emigrant nobles, then to make the king popular at home, and thus finally to construct a strong royalist army. The Constitutional party in the Legislative Assembly had the same ideas as Narbonne. The Girondins sought war; first, from a genuine, if not a profoundly wise, enthusiasm for liberty, which they would fain have spread all over the world; and next, because they thought that war would increase their popularity, and give them decisive control of the situation.

The first effect of the war declared in April, 1792, was to shake down the throne. Operations had no sooner begun than the king became an object of bitter and amply warranted suspicion. Neither the leaders nor the people had forgotten his flight a year before to place himself at the head of the foreign invaders, nor the letter that he had left behind him for the National Assembly, protesting against all that had been done. They were again reminded of what short shrift they might expect if the king's friends should come back. The Duke of Brunswick at the head of the foreign army set out on his march, and issued his famous proclamation to the inhabitants of France. He demanded immediate and unconditional submission; he threatened with fire and sword every town, village, or hamlet, that should dare to defend itself; and finally, he swore that if the smallest violence or insult were done to the king or his family, the city of Paris should be handed over to military execution and absolute destruction.

This insensate document bears marks in every line of the implacable hate and burning thirst for revenge that consumed the aristocratic refugees. Only civil war can awaken such rage as Brunswick's manifesto betrayed. It was drawn up by the French nobles at Coblenz. He merely signed it. The reply to it was the memorable insurrection of the Tenth of August, 1792. The king was thrown into prison, and the Legislative Assembly made way for the National Convention.

Robespierre's part in the great rising of August was only secondary. Only a few weeks before he had started a journal and written articles in a constitutional sense. M. D'Héricault believes a story that Robespierre's aim in this had been to have himself accepted as tutor for the young Dauphin. It is impossible to prove a negative, but we find great difficulty in believing that such a post could ever have been an object of Robespierre's ambition. Now and always he showed a rather singular preference for the substance of power over its glitter. He was vain and an egoist, but in spite of this, and in spite of his passion for empty phrases, he was not without a sense of reality.

The insurrection of the 10th of August, however, was the idea, not of Robespierre, but of a more commanding personage, who now became one of the foremost of the Jacobin chiefs. De Maistre, that ardent champion of reaction, found a striking argument for the presence of the divine hand in the Revolution, in the intense mediocrity of the revolutionary leaders. How could such men, he asked, have achieved such results, if they had not been instruments of the directing will of heaven? Danton at any rate is above this caustic criticism. Danton was of the Herculean type of a Luther, though without Luther's deep vision of spiritual things; or a Chatham, though without Chatham's august majesty of life; or a Cromwell,

though without Cromwell's calm steadfastness of patriotic purpose. His visage and port seemed to declare his character: dark overhanging brows; eyes that had the gleam of lightning; a savage mouth; an immense head; the voice of a Stentor. Madame Roland pictured him as a fiercer Sardanapalus. Artists called him Jove the Thunderer. His enemies saw in him the Satan of the Paradise Lost. He was no moral regenerator; the difference between him and Robespierre is typified in Danton's version of an old saying, that he who hates vices hates men. He was not free from that careless life-contemning desperation, which sometimes belongs to forcible natures. Danton cannot be called noble, because nobility implies a purity, an elevation, and a kind of seriousness which were not his. He was too heedless of his good name, and too blind to the truth that though right and wrong may be near neighbours, yet the line that separates them is of an awful sacredness. If Robespierre passed for a hypocrite by reason of his scruple, Danton seemed a desperado by his airs of 'immoral thoughtlessness.' But the world forgives much to a royal size, and Danton was one of the men who strike deep notes. He had that largeness of motive, fulness of nature, and capaciousness of mind, which will always redeem a multitude of infirmities.

Though the author of some of the most tremendous and far-sounding phrases of an epoch that was only too rich in them, yet phrases had no empire over him; he was their master, not their dupe. Of all the men who succeeded Mirabeau as directors of the unchained forces, we feel that Danton alone was in his true element. Action, which poisoned the blood of such men as Robespierre, and drove such men as Vergniaud out of their senses with exaltation, was to Danton his native sphere. When France was for a moment dis-

couraged, it was he who nerved her to new effort by the electrifying cry, '*We must dare, and again dare, and without end dare!*' If his rivals or his friends seemed too intent on trifles, too apt to confound side issues with the central aim of the battle, Danton was ever ready to urge them to take a juster measure:—'*When the edifice is all ablaze, I take little heed of the knaves who are pilfering the household goods; I rush to put out the flames.*' When base egoism was compromising a cause more priceless than the personality of any man, it was Danton who made them ashamed by the soul-inspiring exclamation, '*Let my name be blotted out and my memory perish, if only France may be free.*' The Girondins denounced the popular clubs of Paris as hives of lawlessness and outrage. Danton warned them that it were wiser to go to these seething societies and to guide them, than to waste breath in futile denunciation. 'A nation in revolution,' he cried to them, in a superb figure, 'is like the bronze boiling and foaming and purifying itself in the cauldron. Not yet is the statue of Liberty cast. Fiercely boils the metal; have an eye on the furnace, or the flame will surely scorch you.' If there was murderous work below the hatches, that was all the more reason why the steersman should keep his hand strong and ready on the wheel, with an eye quick for each new drift in the hurricane, and each new set in the raging currents. This is ever the figure under which one conceives Danton—a Titanic shape doing battle with the fury of the seas, yielding while flood upon flood sweeps wildly over him, and then with unshaken foothold and undaunted front once more surveying the waste of waters, and striving with dexterous energy to force the straining vessel over the waters of the bar.

La Fayette had called the huge giant of popular force from its squalid lurking-places, and now he trembled before its

presence, and fled from it shrieking, with averted hands. Marat thrust swords into the giant's half-unwilling grasp, and plied him with bloody incitement to slay hip and thigh, and so filled the land with a horror that has not faded from out of men's minds to this day. Danton instantly discerned that the problem was to preserve revolutionary energy, and still to persuade the insurgent forces to retire once more within their boundaries. Robespierre discerned this too, but he was paralysed and bewildered by his own principles, as the convinced doctrinaire is so apt to be amid the perplexities of practice. The teaching of Rousseau was ever pouring like thin smoke among his ideas, and clouding his view of actual conditions. The Tenth of August produced a considerable change in Robespierre's point of view. It awoke him to the precipitous steepness of the slope down which the revolutionary car was rushing headlong. His faith in the infallibility of the people suffered no shock, but he was in a moment alive to the need of walking warily, and his whole march from now until the end, twenty-three months later, became timorous, cunning, and oblique. His intelligence seemed to move in subterranean tunnels, with the gleam of an equivocal premiss at one end, and the mist of a vague conclusion at the other.

The enthusiastic pedant, with his narrow understanding, his thin purism, and his idyllic sentimentalism, found that the summoning archangel of his paradise proved to be a ruffian with a pike. The shock must have been tremendous. Robespierre did not quail nor retreat; he only revised his notion of the situation. A curious interview once took place between him and Marat. Robespierre began by assuring the Friend of the People that he quite understood the atrocious demands for blood with which the columns of Marat's newspaper were filled, to be merely useful exaggerations of his real

designs. Marat repelled the disparaging imputation of clemency and common sense, and talked in his familiar vein of poniarding brigands, burning despots alive in their palaces, and impaling the traitors of the Assembly on their own benches. 'Robespierre,' says Marat, 'listened to me with affright; he turned pale and said nothing. The interview confirmed the opinion I had always had of him, that he united the integrity of a thoroughly honest man and the zeal of a good patriot, with the enlightenment of a wise senator, but that he was without either the views or the audacity of a real statesman.' The picture is instructive, for it shows us Robespierre's invariable habit of leaving violence and iniquity unrebuked; of conciliating the practitioners of violence and iniquity; and of contenting himself with an inward hope of turning the world into a right course by fine words. He had no audacity in Marat's sense, but he was no coward. He knew, as all these men knew, that almost from hour to hour he carried his life in his hand, yet he declined to seek shelter in the obscurity which saved such men as Sieyès. But if he had courage, he had not the initiative of a man of action. He invented none of the ideas or methods of the Revolution, not even the Reign of Terror, but he was very dexterous in accepting or appropriating what more audacious spirits than himself had devised and enforced. The pedant, cursed with the ambition to be a ruler of men, is a curious study. He would be glad not to go too far, and yet his chief dread is lest he be left behind. His consciousness of pure aims allows him to become an accomplice in the worst crimes. Suspecting himself at bottom to be a theorist, he hastens to clear his character as man of practice by conniving at an enormity. Thus, in September, 1792, a band of miscreants committed the grievous massacres in the prisons of Paris. Robespierre,

though the best evidence goes to show that he not only did not abet the prison murders, but in his heart deplored them, yet after the event did not scruple to justify what had been done. This was the beginning of a long course of compliance with sanguinary misdeeds, for which Robespierre has been as hotly execrated as if he prompted them. We do not, for the moment, measure the relative degrees of guilt that attached to mere compliance, on the one hand, and cruel origination on the other. But his position in the Revolution is not rightly understood, unless we recognize him as being in almost every case an accessory after the fact.

Between the fall of Lewis in 1792 and the fall of Robespierre in 1794, France was the scene of two main series of events. One set comprises the repulse of the invaders, the suppression of an extensive civil war, and the attempted reconstruction of a social framework. The other comprises the rapid phases of an internecine struggle of violent and short-lived factions. By an unhappy fatality, due partly to anti-democratic prejudice, and partly to men's unfailing passion for melodrama, the Reign of Terror has been popularly taken for the central and most important part of the revolutionary epic. This is nearly as absurd as it would be to make Gustave Flourens' manifestation of the Fifth of October, or the rising of the Thirty-first of October, the most prominent features in a history of the war of French defence in our own day. In truth, the Terror was a mere episode; and just as the rising of October, 1870, was due to Marshal Bazaine's capitulation at Metz, it is easy to see that, with one exception, every violent movement in Paris, from 1792 to 1794, was due to menace or disaster on the frontier. Every one of the famous days of Paris was an answer to some enemy without. The storm of the Tuileries on the Tenth of August, as we have already said,

was the response to Brunswick's proclamation. The bloody days of September were the reaction of panic at the capture of Longwy and Verdun by the Prussians. The surrender of Cambrai provoked the execution of Marie Antoinette. The defeat of Aix-la-Chapelle produced the abortive insurrection of the Tenth of March; and the treason of Dumouriez, the reverses of Custine, and the rebellion in La Vendée, produced the effectual insurrection of the Thirty-first of May, 1793. The last of these two risings of Paris, headed by the Commune, against the Convention which was until then controlled by the Girondins, at length gave the government of France and the defence of the Revolution definitely over to the Jacobins. Their patriotic dictatorship lasted unbroken for a short period of ten months, and then the great party broke up into factions. The splendid triumphs of the dictatorship have been, in England at any rate, too usually forgotten, and only the crimes of the factions remembered. Robespierre's history unfortunately belongs to the less important battle.

II.

The Girondins were driven out of the Convention by the insurgent Parisians at the beginning of June, 1793. The movement may be roughly compared to that of the Independents in our own Rebellion, when the army compelled the withdrawal of eleven of the Presbyterian leaders from the parliament; or, it may recall Pride's memorable Purge of the same famous assembly. Both cases illustrate the common truth that large deliberative bodies, be they never so excellent for purposes of legislation, and even for a general control of the executive government in ordinary times, are found to be essentially unfit for directing a military crisis. If there are any historic examples that at first seem to contradict such a pro-

position, it will be found that the bodies in question were close aristocracies, like the Great Council of Venice, or the Senate of Rome in the strong days of the Commonwealth; they were never the creatures of popular election, with varying aims and a diversified political spirit. Modern publicists have substituted the divine right of assemblies for the old divine right of monarchies. Those who condone the violence done to the king on the Tenth of August, and even acquiesce in his execution five months afterwards, are relentless against the violence done to the Convention on the Thirty-first of May. We confess ourselves unable to follow this transfer of the superstition of sacrosanctity from a king to a chamber. No doubt, the sooner a nation acquires a settled government, the better for it, provided the government be efficient. But if it be not efficient, the mischief of actively suppressing it may well be fully outweighed by the mischief of retaining it. We have no wish to smooth over the perversities of a revolutionary time; they cost a nation very dear; but if all the elements of the state are in furious convulsion and uncontrollable effervescence, then it is childish to measure the march of events by the standard of happier days of social peace and political order. The prospect before France at the violent close of Girondin supremacy was as formidable as any nation has ever yet had to confront in the history of the world. Rome was not more critically placed when the defeat of Varro on the plain of Cannæ had broken up her alliances and ruined her army. The brave patriots of the Netherlands had no gloomier outlook at that dolorous moment when the Prince of Orange had left them, and Alva had been appointed to bring them back by rapine, conflagration, and murder, under the loathed yoke of the Spanish tyrant.

Let us realize the conditions that Robespierre and Danton

and the other Jacobin leaders had now to face. In the north-west one division of the fugitive Girondins was forming an army at Caen; in the south-west another division was doing the same at Bordeaux. Marseilles and Lyons were rallying all the disaffected and reactionary elements in the south-east. La Vendée had flamed out in wild rebellion for Church and King. The strong places on the north frontier, and the strong places on the east, were in the hands of the foreign enemy. The fate of the Revolution lay in the issue of a struggle between Paris, with less than a score of departments on her side, and all the rest of France and the whole European coalition marshalled against her. And even this was not the worst. In Paris itself a very considerable proportion of its half-million of inhabitants were disaffected to the revolutionary cause. Reactionary historians dwell on the fact that such risings as that of the Tenth of August were devised by no more than half of the sections into which Paris was divided. It was common, they say, for half a dozen individuals to take upon themselves to represent the fourteen or fifteen hundred other members of a section. But what better proof can we have that if France was to be delivered from restored feudalism and foreign spoliation, the momentous task must be performed by those who had sense to discern the awful peril, and energy to encounter it?

The Girondins had made their incapacity plain. The execution of the king had filled them with alarm, and with hatred against the ruder and more robust party who had forced that startling act of vengeance upon them. Puny social disgusts prevented them from co-operating with Danton or with Robespierre. Prussia and Austria were not more redoubtable or more hateful to them than was Paris, and they wasted, in futile recriminations about the September massacres or the alleged peculations of municipal officers, the time and the

energy that should have been devoted without let or interruption to the settlement of the administration and the repulse of the foe. It is impossible to think of such fine characters as Vergniaud or Madame Roland without admiration, or of their untimely fate without pity. But the deliverance of a people beset by strong and implacable enemies could not wait on mere good manners and fastidious sentiments, when these comely things were in company with the most stupendous want of foresight ever shown by a political party. How can we measure the folly of men who so missed the conditions of the problem as to cry out in the Convention itself, almost within earshot of the Jacobin Club, that if any insult were offered to the national representation, the departments would rise, 'Paris would be annihilated; and men would come to search on the banks of the Seine whether such a city had ever existed!' It was to no purpose that Danton urgently rebuked the senseless animosity with which the Right poured incessant malediction on the Left, and the wild shrieking hate with which the Left retaliated on the Right. The battle was to the death, and it was the Girondins who first menaced their political foes with vengeance and the guillotine. As it happened, the treason of Dumouriez and their own ineptitude destroyed them before revenge was within reach. Such a consummation was fortunate for their country. It was the Girondins whose want of union and energy had by the middle of 1793 brought France to distraction and imminent ruin. It was a short year of Jacobin government that by the summer of 1794 had welded the nation together again, and finally conquered the invasion. The city of the Seine had once more shown itself what it had been for nine centuries, ever since the days of Odo, Count of Paris and first king of the French, not merely a capital, but France itself, 'its living heart and surest bulwark.'

The immediate instrument of so rapid and extraordinary an achievement was the Committee of Public Safety. The French have never shown their quick genius for organization with more triumphant vigour. While the Girondins were still powerful, nine members of the Convention had been constituted an executive committee, April 6, 1793. They were in fact a kind of permanent cabinet, with practical irresponsibility. In the summer of 1793 the number was increased from nine to twelve, and these twelve were the centre of the revolutionary government. They fell into three groups. First, there were the scientific or practical administrators, of whom the most eminent was Carnot. Next came the directors of internal policy, the pure revolutionists, headed by Billaud de Varennes. Finally, there was a trio whose business it was to translate action into the phrases of revolutionary policy. This famous group was Robespierre, Couthon, and Saint Just.

Besides the Committee of Public Safety there was another chief governmental committee, that of General Security. Its functions were mainly connected with the police, the arrests, and the prisons, but in all serious affairs the two Committees deliberated in common. There were also fourteen other groups of various size, taken from the Convention; they applied themselves with admirable zeal, and usually not with more zeal than skill, to schemes of public instruction, of finance, of legislation, of the administration of justice, and a host of other civil reforms, of all of which Napoleon Bonaparte was by-and-by to reap the credit. These bodies completed the civil revolution, which the Constituent and the Legislative Assemblies had left so mischievously incomplete, that as soon as ever the Convention had assembled, it was besieged by a host of petitioners praying them to explain and to pursue the abolition of the old feudal rights. Everything had still been left uncertain in

men's minds, even upon that greatest of all the revolutionary questions. The feudal division of the committee of general legislation had in this eleventh hour to decide innumerable issues, from those of the widest practical importance, down to the prayer of a remote commune to be relieved from the charge of maintaining a certain mortuary lamp which had been a matter of seignorial obligation. The work done by the radical jurisconsults was never undone. It was the great and durable reward of the struggle. And we have to remember that these industrious and efficient bodies, as well as all other public bodies and functionaries whatever, were placed by the definite revolutionary constitution of 1793 under the direct orders of the Committee of Public Safety.

It is hardly possible even now for any one who exults in the memory of the great deliverance of a brilliant and sociable people, to stand unmoved before the walls of that palace which Philibert Delorme reared for Catherine de' Medici, and which was thrown into ruin by the madness of a band of desperate men in our own days. Lewis had walked forth from the Tuileries on the fatal morning of the Tenth of August, holding his children by the hand, and lightly noticing, as he traversed the gardens, how early that year the leaves were falling. Lewis had by this time followed the fallen leaves into nothingness. The palace of the kings was now styled the Palace of the Nation, and the new republic carried on its work surrounded by the outward associations of the old monarchy. The Convention after the spring of 1793 held its sittings in what had formerly been the palace theatre. Fierce men from the Faubourgs of St. Antoine and St. Marceau, and fiercer women from the markets, shouted savage applause or menace from galleries, where not so long ago the Italian buffoons had

amused the perpetual leisure of the finest ladies and proudest grandees of France. The Committee of General Security occupied the Pavillon de Marsan, looking over a dingy space that the conqueror at Rivoli afterwards made the most dazzling street in Europe. The Committee of Public Safety sat in the Pavillon de Flore, at the opposite end of the Tuileries on the river bank. The approaches were protected by guns and by a body-guard, while inside there flitted to and fro a cloud of familiars, who have been compared by the enemies of the great Committee to the mutes of the court of the Grand Turk. Any one who had business with this awful body had to grope his way along gloomy corridors, that were dimly lighted by a single lamp at either end. The room in which the Committee sat round a table of green cloth, was incongruously gay with the clocks, the bronzes, the mirrors, the tapestries, of the ruined court. The members met at eight in the morning and worked until one; from one to four they attended the sitting of the Convention. In the evening they met again, and usually sat until night was far advanced. It was no wonder if their hue became cadaverous, their eyes hollow and bloodshot, their brows stern, their glance pre-occupied and sinister. Between ten and eleven every evening a sombre piece of business was transacted, which has half effaced in the memory of posterity all the heroic industry of the rest of the twenty-four hours. It was then that Fouquier-Tinville, the public prosecutor, brought an account of his day's labour; how the revolutionary tribunal was working, how many had been convicted and how many acquitted, how large or how small had been the batch of the guillotine since the previous night. Across the breadth of the gardens, beyond their trees and fountains, stood the Monster itself, with its cruel symmetry, its colour as of the blood of the dead, its unheeding knife, neutral as the Fates.

Robespierre has been held responsible for all the violences of the revolutionary government, and his position on the Committee appeared to be exceedingly strong. It was, however, for a long time much less strong in reality than it seemed: all depended upon successfully playing off one force against another, and at the same time maintaining himself at the centre of the see-saw. Robespierre was the literary and rhetorical member of the band; he was the author of the strident manifestoes in which Europe listened with exasperation to the audacious hopes and unfaltering purpose of the new France. This had the effect of investing him in the eyes of foreign nations with supreme and undisputed authority over the government. The truth is, that Robespierre was both disliked and despised by his colleagues. They thought of him as a mere maker of useful phrases; he in turn secretly looked down upon them, as the man who has a doctrine and a system in his head always looks down upon the man who lives from hand to mouth. If the Committee had been in the place of a government which has no opposition to fear, Robespierre would have been one of its least powerful members. But although the government was strong, there were at least three potent elements of opposition even within the ranks of the dominant revolutionary party itself.

Three bodies in Paris were, each of them, the centre of an influence that might at any moment become the triumphant rival of the Committee of Public Safety. These bodies were, first, the Convention; second, the Commune of Paris; and thirdly, the Jacobin Club. The jealousy thus existing outside the Committee would have made any failure instantly destructive. At one moment, at the end of 1793, it was only the surrender of Toulon that saved the Committee from a hostile motion in the Convention, and such a motion would

have sent half of them to the guillotine. They were reviled by the extreme party who ruled at the Town Hall for not carrying the policy of extermination far enough. They were reproached by Danton and his powerful section for carrying that policy too far. They were discredited by the small band of intriguers, like Bazire, who identified government with peculation. Finally, they were haunted by the shadow of a fear, which events were by-and-by to prove only too substantial, lest one of their military agents on the frontier should make himself their master. The key to the struggle of the factions between the winter of 1793 and the revolution of the summer of 1794 is the vigorous resolve of the governing Committees not to part with power. The drama is one of the most exciting in the history of faction; it abounds in rapid turns and unexpected shifts, upon which the student may spend many a day and many a night, and after all he is forced to leave off in despair of threading an accurate way through the labyrinth of passion and intrigue. The broad traits of the situation, however, are tolerably simple. The difficulty was to find a principle of government which the people could be induced to accept. 'The rights of men and the new principles of liberty and equality,' Burke said, 'were very unhandy instruments for those who wished to establish a system of tranquillity and order. The factions,' he added with fierce sarcasm, 'were to accomplish the purposes of order, morality, and submission to the laws, from the principles of atheism, profligacy, and sedition. They endeavoured to establish distinctions, by the belief of which they hoped to keep the spirit of murder safely bottled up and sealed for their own purposes, without endangering themselves by the fumes of the poison which they prepared for their enemies.' This is a ferocious and passionate version, but it is substantially not an unreal account of the position.

Upon one point all parties agreed, and that was the necessity of founding the government upon force, and force naturally meant Terror. Their plea was that of Dido to Ilioneus and the stormbeaten sons of Dardanus, when they complained that her people had drawn the sword upon them, and barbarously denied the hospitality of the sandy shore:—

'Res dura et regni novitas me talia cogunt
Moliri.'

And that pithy chapter in Machiavelli's *Prince* which treats of cruelty and clemency, and whether it be better to be loved or feared, anticipates the defence of the Terrorists, in the maxim that for a new prince it is impossible to avoid the name of cruel, because all new states abound in many perils. The difference arose on the question when Terror should be considered to have done as much of its work as it could be expected to do. This difference again was connected with difference of conception as to the type of the society which was ultimately to emerge from the existing chaos. Billaud-Varennes, the guiding spirit of the Committees, was without any conception of this kind. He was a man of force pure and simple. Danton was equally untouched by dreams of social transformation; his philosophy, so far as he had a definite philosophy, was, in spite of one or two inconsistent utterances, materialistic: and materialism, when it takes root in a sane, perspicacious, and indulgent character, as in the case of Danton, and, to take a better-known example, in the case of Jefferson, usually leads to a sound and positive theory of politics; chimeras have no place in it, though a rational social hope has the first place of all. Neither Danton nor Billaud expected a millennium; their only aim was to shape France into a coherent political personality, and the war between them turned upon the policy of prolonging the Terror

after the frontiers had been saved and the risings in the provinces put down. There were, however, two parties who took the literature of the century in earnest; they thought that the hour had struck for translating, one of them, the sentimentalism of Rousseau, the other of them, the rationality of Voltaire and Diderot, into terms of politics that should form the basis of a new social life. The strife between the faction of Robespierre and the faction of Chaumette was the reproduction, under the shadow of the guillotine, of the great literary strife of a quarter of a century before between Jean Jacques and the writers whom he contemptuously styled Holbachians. The battle of the books had become a battle between bands of infuriated men. The struggle between Hébert and Chaumette and the Common Council of Paris on the one part, and the Committee and Robespierre on the other, was the concrete form of the deepest controversy that lies before modern society. Can the social union subsist without a belief in God? Chaumette answered Yes, and Robespierre cried No. Robespierre followed Rousseau in thinking that any one who should refuse to recognize the existence of a God, should be exiled as a monster devoid of the faculties of virtue and sociability. Chaumette followed Diderot, and Diderot told Samuel Romilly in 1783 that belief in God, as well as submission to kings, would be at an end all over the world in a very few years. The Hébertists might have taken for their motto Diderot's shocking couplet, if they could have known it, about using

'Les entrailles du prêtre
Au défaut d'un cordon pour étrangler les rois.'

The theists and the atheists, Chaumette and Robespierre, each of them accepted the doctrine that it was in the power of the armed legislator to impose any belief and any rites he pleased upon the country at his feet. The theism or the atheism of

the new France depended, as they thought, on the issue of the war for authority between the Hébertists in the Common Council of Paris, and the Committee of Public Safety. That was the religious side of the attitude of the government to the opposition, and it is the side that possesses most historic interest. Billaud cared very little for religion in any way; his quarrel with the Commune and with Hébert was political. What Robespierre's drift appears to have been, was to use the political animosity of the Committee as a means of striking foes, against whom his own animosity was not only political but religious also.

It would doubtless show a very dull apprehension of the violence and confusion of the time, to suppose that even Robespierre, with all his love for concise theories, was accustomed to state his aim to himself with the definite neatness in which it appears when reduced to literary statement. Pedant as he was, he was yet enough of a politician to see the practical urgency of restoring material order, whatever spiritual belief or disbelief might accompany it. The prospect of a rallying point for material order was incessantly changing; and Robespierre turned to different quarters in search of it almost from week to week. He was only able to exert a certain limited authority over his colleagues in the government, by virtue of his influence over the various sections of possible opposition, and this was a moral, and not an official, influence. It was acquired not by marked practical gifts, for in truth Robespierre did not possess them, but by his good character, by his rhetoric, and by the skill with which he kept himself prominently before the public eye. The effective seat of his power, notwithstanding many limits and incessant variations, was the Jacobin Club. There a speech from him threw his listeners into ecstasies, that have been disrespectfully compared to the

paroxysms of Jansenist convulsionaries, or the hysterics of Methodist negroes on a cotton plantation. We naturally think of those grave men who a few years before had founded the republic in America. Jefferson served with Washington in the Virginian legislature and with Franklin in Congress, and he afterwards said that he never heard either of them speak ten minutes at a time; while John Adams declared that he never heard Jefferson utter three sentences together. Of Robespierre it is stated on good authority that for eighteen months there was not a single evening on which he did not make to the assembled Jacobins at least one speech, and that never a short one.

Strange as it may seem, Robespierre's credit with this grim assembly was due to his truly Philistine respectability and to his literary faculty. He figured as the philosopher and bookman of the party: the most iconoclastic politicians are usually willing to respect the scholar, provided they are sure of his being on their side. Robespierre had from the first discountenanced the fantastic caprices of some too excitable allies. He distrusted the noisy patriots of the middle class, who curried favour with the crowd by clothing themselves in coarse garments, clutching a pike, and donning the famous cap of red woollen, which had been the emblem of the emancipation of a slave in ancient Rome. One night at the Jacobin Club, Robespierre mounted the tribune, dressed with his usual elaborate neatness, and still wearing powder in his hair. An on-looker unceremoniously planted on the orator's head the red cap demanded by revolutionary etiquette. Robespierre threw the sacred symbol on the ground with a severe air, and then proceeded with a discourse of much austerity. Not that he was averse to a certain seemly decoration, or to the embodiment of revolutionary sentiment by means of a symbolism

that strikes our cooler imagination as rather puerile. He was as ready as others to use the arts of the theatre for the liturgy of patriots. One of the most touching of all the minor dramatic incidents of the Revolution was the death of Barra. This was a child of thirteen who enrolled himself as a drummer, and marched with the Blues to suppress the rebel Whites in La Vendée. One day he advanced too close to the enemy's post, intrepidly beating the charge. He was surrounded, but the peasant soldiers were loth to strike. 'Cry *Long live the King!*' they shouted, 'or else death!' 'Long live the Republic!' was the poor little hero's answer, as a ball pierced his heart. Robespierre described the incident to the Convention, and amid prodigious enthusiasm demanded that the body of the young martyr of liberty should be transported to the Pantheon with special pomp, and that David, the artist of the Revolution, should be charged with the duty of devising and embellishing the festival. As it happened, the arrangements were made for the ceremony to take place on the Tenth of Thermidor—a day on which Robespierre and all Paris were concerned about a celebration of bloodier import. Thermidor, however, was still far off; and the red sun of Jacobin enthusiasm seemed as if it would shine unclouded for ever.

Even at the Jacobins, however, popular as he was, Robespierre felt every instant the necessity of walking cautiously. He was as far removed as possible from that position of Dictator which some historians with a wearisome iteration persist in ascribing to him, even at the moment when they are enumerating the defeats which the party of Hébert was able to inflict upon him in the very bosom of the Mother Club itself. They make him the sanguinary dictator in one sentence, and the humiliated intriguer in the next. The latter is much the more correct account of the two, if we choose to

call a man an intriguer who was honestly anxious to suppress what he considered a wicked faction, and yet had need of some dexterity to keep his own head upon his shoulders.

In the winter of 1793 the Municipal party, guided by Hébert and Chaumette, made their memorable attempt to extirpate Christianity in France. The doctrine of D'Holbach's supper-table had for a short space the arm of flesh and the sword of the temporal power on its side. It was the first appearance of dogmatic atheism in Europe as a political force. This makes it one of the most remarkable moments in the Revolution, just as it makes the Revolution itself the most remarkable moment in modern history. The first political demonstration of atheism was attended by some of the excesses, the folly, the extravagances that stained the growth of Christianity. On the whole it is a very mild story compared with the atrocities of the Jewish records or the crimes of Catholicism. The worst charge against the party of Chaumette is that they were intolerant, and the charge is deplorably true; but this charge cannot lie in the mouth of persecuting churches.

Historical recriminations, however, are not very edifying. It is perfectly fair when Catholics talk of the atheist Terror, to rejoin that the retainers of Anjou and Montpensier slew more men and women on the first day of the Saint Bartholomew than perished in Paris through the Years I. and II. But the retort does us no good beyond the region of dialectic; it rather brings us down to the level of the poor sectaries whom it crushes. Let us raise ourselves into clearer air. The fault of the atheists is that they knew no better than to borrow the maxims of the churchmen; and even those who agree with the dogmatic denials of the atheists—if such there be—ought yet

to admit that the mere change from superstition to reason is a small gain, if the conclusions of reason are still to be enforced by the instruments of superstition. Our opinions are less important than the spirit and temper with which they possess us, and even good opinions are worth very little unless we hold them in a broad, intelligent, and spacious way. Now some of the opinions of Chaumette were full of enlightenment and hope. He had a generous and vivid faith in humanity, and he showed the natural effect of abandoning belief in another life by his energetic interest in arrangements for improving the lot of man in this life. But it would be far better to share the superstitious opinions of a virtuous and benignant priest like the Bishop in Victor Hugo's *Misérables*, than to hold those good opinions of Chaumette as he held them, with a rancorous intolerance, a reckless disregard of the rights and feelings of others, and a shallow forgetfulness of all that great and precious part of our natures that lies out of the immediate domain of the logical understanding. One can understand how an honest man would abhor the darkness and tyranny of the Church. But then to borrow the same absolutism in the interests of new light, was inevitably to bring the new light into the same abhorrence as had befallen the old system of darkness. And this is exactly what happened. In every family where a mother sought to have her child baptized, or where sons and daughters sought to have the dying spirit of the old consoled by the last sacrament, there sprang up a bitter enemy to the government which had closed the churches and proscribed the priests.

How could a society whose spiritual life had been nourished in the solemn mysticism of the Middle Ages, suddenly turn to embrace a gaudy paganism? The common self-respect of humanity was outraged by apostate priests who, whether under

the pressure of fear of Chaumette, or in a very superfluity of folly and ecstasy of degradation, hastened to proclaim the charlatanry of their past lives, as they filed before the Convention, led by the Archbishop of Paris, and accompanied by rude acolytes bearing piles of the robes and the vessels of silver and gold with which they had once served their holy offices. 'Our enemies,' Voltaire had said, 'have always on their side the fat of the land, the sword, the strong box, and the *canaille*.' For a moment all these forces were on the other side, and it is deplorable to think that they were as much abused by their new masters as by the old. The explanation is that the destructive party had been brought up in the schools of the ecclesiastical party, and their work was a mere outbreak of mutiny, not a grave and responsible attempt to lead France to a worthier faith. If, as Chaumette believed, mankind are the only Providence of men, surely in that faith more than in any other are we bound to be very solicitous not to bring the violent hand of power on any of the spiritual acquisitions of the race, and very patient in dealing with the slowness of the common people to leave their outworn creeds.

Instead of defying the Church by the theatrical march of the Goddess of Reason under the great sombre arches of the Cathedral of Our Lady, Chaumette should have found comfort in a firm calculation of the conditions. 'You,' he might have said to the priests,—'you have so debilitated the minds of men and women by your promises and your dreams, that many a generation must come and go before Europe can throw off the yoke of your superstition. But we promise you that they shall be generations of strenuous battle. We give you all the advantages that you can get from the sincerity and pious worth of the good and simple among you. We give you all that the bad among you may get by resort to the poisoned weapons of

your profession and its traditions,—its bribes to mental indolence, its hypocritical affectations in the pulpit, its tyranny in the closet, its false speciousness in the world, its menace at the deathbed. With all these you may do your worst, and still humanity will escape you; still the conscience of the race will rise away from you; still the growth of brighter ideals and a nobler purpose will go on, leaving ever further and further behind them your dwarfed finality and leaden moveless stereotype. We shall pass you by on your flank; your fieriest darts will only spend themselves on air. We will not attack you as Voltaire did; we will not exterminate you; we shall explain you. History will place your dogma in its class, above or below a hundred competing dogmas, exactly as the naturalist classifies his species. From being a conviction, it will sink to a curiosity; from being the guide to millions of human lives, it will dwindle down to a chapter in a book. As History explains your dogma, so Science will dry it up; the conception of law will silently make the conception of the daily miracle of your altars seem impossible; the mental climate will gradually deprive your symbols of their nourishment, and men will turn their backs on your system, not because they have confuted it, but because, like witchcraft or astrology, it has ceased to interest them. The great ship of your Church, once so stout and fair and well laden with good destinies, is become a skeleton ship; it is a phantom hulk, with warped planks and sere canvas, and you who work it are no more than ghosts of dead men, and at the hour when you seem to have reached the bay, down your ship will sink like lead or like stone to the deepest bottom."

Alas, the speculation of the century had not rightly attuned men's minds to this firm confidence in the virtue of liberty, sounding like a bell through all distractions. None of these

high things were said. The temples were closed, the sacred symbols defiled, the priests maltreated, the worshippers dispersed. The Commune of Paris imitated the policy of the king of France who revoked the Edict of Nantes, and democratic atheism parodied the dragonnades of absolutist Catholicism.

Robespierre was unutterably outraged by the proceedings of the atheists. They perplexed him as a politician intent upon order, and they afflicted him sorely as an ardent disciple of the Savoyard Vicar. Hébert, however, was so strong that it needed some courage to attack him, nor did Robespierre dare to withstand him to the face. But he did not flinch from making an energetic assault upon atheism and the excesses of its partisans. His admirers usually count his speech of the Twenty-first of November one of the most admirable of his oratorical successes. The Sphinx still sits inexorable at our gates, and his words have lost none of their interest. 'Every philosopher and every individual,' he said, 'may adopt whatever opinion he pleases about atheism. Anyone who wishes to make such an opinion into a crime is an insensate; but the public man or the legislator who should adopt such a system, would be a hundred times more insensate still. The National Convention abhors it. The Convention is not the author of a scheme of metaphysics. It was not to no purpose that it published the Declaration of the Rights of Man in presence of the Supreme Being. I shall be told perhaps that I have a narrow intelligence, that I am a man of prejudice, and a fanatic. I have already said that I spoke neither as an individual nor as a philosopher with a system, but as a representative of the people. *Atheism is aristocratic. The idea of a great being who watches over oppressed innocence and punishes triumphant*

crime is essentially the idea of the people. This is the sentiment of Europe and the Universe; it is the sentiment of the French nation. That people is attached neither to priests, nor to superstition, nor to ceremonies; it is attached only to worship in itself, or in other words to the idea of an incomprehensible Power, the terror of wrongdoers, the stay and comfort of virtue, to which it delights to render words of homage that are all so many anathemas against injustice and triumphant crime.'

This is Robespierre's favourite attitude, the priest posing as statesman. Like others, he declares the Supreme Power incomprehensible, and then describes him in terms of familiar comprehension. He first declares atheism an open choice, and then he brands it with the most odious epithet in the accepted vocabulary of the hour. Danton followed practically the same line, though saying much less about it. 'If Greece,' he said in the Convention, 'had its Olympian games, France too shall solemnize her sans-culottid days. The people will have high festivals; they will offer incense to the Supreme Being, to the master of nature; for we never intended to annihilate the reign of superstition in order to set up the reign of atheism. . . . If we have not honoured the priest of error and fanaticism, neither do we wish to honour the priest of incredulity: we wish to serve the people. I demand that there shall be an end of these anti-religious masquerades in the Convention.'

There was an end of the masquerading, but the Hébertists still kept their ground. Danton, Robespierre, and the Committee were all equally impotent against them for some months longer. The revolutionary force had been too strong to be resisted by any government since the Paris insurgents had carried both king and assembly in triumph from Versailles in the October of 1789. It was now too strong for those who had begun to strive with all their might to build a new government

out of the agencies that had shattered the old to pieces. For some months the battle which had been opened by Robespierre's remonstrance against atheistic intolerance, degenerated into a series of masked skirmishes. The battle-ground of rival principles was overshadowed by the baleful wings of the genius of demonic Hate. *Vexilla regis prodeunt inferni;* the banners of the King of the Pit came forth. The scene at the Cordeliers for a time became as frantic as a Council of the Early Church settling the true composition of the Holy Trinity. Or it recalls the fierce and bloody contentions between Demos and Oligarchy in an old Greek town. We think of the day in the harbour of Corcyra when the Athenian admiral who had come to deliver the people, sailed out to meet the Spartan enemy, and on turning round to see if his Corcyrean allies were following, saw them following indeed, but the crew of every ship striving in enraged conflict with one another. Collot D'Herbois had come back in hot haste from Lyons, where, along with Fouché, he had done his best to carry out the decree of the Convention, that not one stone of the city should be left on the top of another, and that even its very name should cease from the lips of men. Carrier was recalled from Nantes, where his feats of ingenious massacre had rivalled the exploits of the cruellest and maddest of the Roman Emperors. The presence of these men of blood gave new courage and resolution to the Hébertists. Though the alliance was informal, yet as against Danton, Camille Desmoulins, and the rest of the Indulgents, as well as against Robespierre, they made common cause.

Camille Desmoulins attacked Hébert in successive numbers of a journal that is perhaps the one truly literary monument of this stage of the revolution. Hébert retaliated by impugning the patriotism of Desmoulins in the Club, and the unfortunate wit, notwithstanding the efforts of Robespierre on his

behalf, was for a while turned out of the sacred precincts. The power of the extreme faction was shown in relation to other prominent members of the party whom they loved to stigmatise by the deadly names of Indulgent and Moderantist. Even Danton himself was attacked (December, 1793) and the integrity of his patriotism brought into question. Robespierre made an energetic defence of his great rival in the hierarchy of revolution, and the defence saved Danton from the mortal ignominy of expulsion from the communion of the orthodox. On the other hand, Anacharsis Clootz, that guileless ally of the party of delirium, was less fortunate. Robespierre assailed the cosmopolitan for being a German baron, for having four thousand pounds a year, and for striking his sans-culottism some notes higher than the regular pitch. Even M. Louis Blanc calls this an iniquity, and sets it down as the worst page in Robespierre's life. Others have described Robespierre as struck at this time by the dire malady of kings—hatred of the Idea. It seems, however, a hard saying that devotion to the Idea is to extinguish common sense. Clootz, notwithstanding his simple and disinterested character, and his possession of some rays of the modern illumination, was one of the least sane of all the men who in the exultation of their silly gladness were suddenly caught up by that great wheel of fire. All we can say is that Robespierre's bitter demeanour towards Clootz was ungenerous; but then this is only natural in him. Robespierre often clothed cool policy in the semblance of clemency, but I cannot hear in any phrase he ever used, or see in any measure he ever proposed, the mark of true generosity; of kingliness of spirit, not a trace. He had no element of ready and cordial propitiation, an element that can never be wanting in the greatest leaders in time of storm. If he resisted the atrocious proposals to put Madame Elizabeth to

death, he was thinking not of mercy or justice, but of the mischievous effect that her execution would have upon the public opinion of Europe, and he was so unmanly as to speak of her as *la méprisable sœur de Louis XVI.* Such a phrase is the disclosure of an abject stratum in his soul.

Yet this did not prevent him from seeing and denouncing the bloody extravagances of the Proconsuls, the representatives of Parisian authority in the provinces; nor from standing firm against the execution of the Seventy-Three, who had been bold enough to question the purgation of the National Convention on the Thirty-first of May. But the return of Collot d'Herbois made the situation more intricate. Collot was by his position the ally of Billaud, and to attack him, therefore, was to attack the most powerful member of the Committee of Public Safety. Billaud was too formidable. He was always the impersonation of the ruder genius of the Revolution, and the incarnation of the philosophy of the Terror, not as a delirium, but as a piece of deliberate policy. His pale, sober, and concentrated physiognomy seemed a perpetual menace. He had no gifts of speech, but his silence made people shudder, like the silence of the thunder when the tempest rages at its height. It was said by contemporaries that if Vadier was a hyæna, Barère a jackal, and Robespierre a cat, Billaud was a tiger.

The cat perceived that he was in danger of not having the tiger, jackal, and hyæna on his side. Robespierre, in whom spasmodical courage and timidity ruled by rapid turns, began to suspect that he had been premature; and a convenient illness, which some suppose to have been feigned, excused his withdrawal for some weeks from a scene where he felt that he could no longer see clear. We cannot doubt that both he and Danton were perfectly assured that the anarchic party must unavoidably roll headlong into the abyss. But the hour of

doom, was uncertain. To make a mistake in the right moment, to hurry the crisis, was instant death. Robespierre was a more adroit calculator than Danton. We must not confound his thin and querulous reserve with that stout and deep-browed patience, which may imply as superb a fortitude, and may demand as much iron control in a statesman, as the most heroic exploits of political energy. But his habit of waiting on force, instead of, like the other, taking the initiative with force, had trained his sight. The mixture of astuteness with his scruple, of egoistic policy with his stiffness for doctrine, gave him an advantage over Danton, that made his life worth exactly three months more purchase than Danton's. It has been said that Spinozism or Transcendentalism in poetic production becomes Machiavellism in reflection: for the same reasons we may always expect sentimentalism in theory to become under the pressure of action a very self-protecting guile. Robespierre's mind was not rich nor flexible enough for true statesmanship, and it is a grave mistake to suppose that the various cunning tacks in which his career abounds, were any sign of genuine versatility or resource or political growth and expansion. They were, in fact, the resort of a man whose nerves were weaker than his volition. Robespierre was a kind of spinster. Force of head did not match his spiritual ambition. He was not, we repeat, a coward in any common sense; in that case he would have remained quiet among the croaking frogs of the Marsh, and by-and-by have come to hold a portfolio under the First Consul. He did not fear death, and he envied with consuming envy those to whom nature had given the qualities of initiative. But his nerves always played him false. The consciousness of having to resolve to take a decided step alone, was the precursor of a fit of trembling. His heart did not fail, but he could not control the parched voice, nor the

twitching features, nor the ghastly palsy of inner misgiving. In this respect Robespierre recalls a more illustrious man; we think of Cicero tremblingly calling upon the Senate to decide for him whether he should order the execution of the Catilinarian conspirators. It is to be said, however, in his favour that he had the art, which Cicero lacked, to hide his pusillanimity. Robespierre knew himself, and did his best to keep his own secret.

His absence during the final crisis of the anarchic party allowed events to ripen, without committing him to that initiative in dangerous action which he had dreaded on the Tenth of August, as he dreaded it on every other decisive day of this burning time. The party of the Commune became more and more daring in their invectives against the Convention and the Committees. At length they proclaimed open insurrection. But Paris was cold, and opinion was divided. In the night of the Thirteenth of March, Hébert, Chaumette, Clootz, were arrested. The next day Robespierre recovered sufficiently to appear at the Jacobin Club. He joined his colleagues of the Committee of Public Safety in striking the blow. On the Twenty-fourth of March the Ultra-Revolutionist leaders were beheaded.

The first bloody breach in the Jacobin ranks was speedily followed by the second. The Right wing of the opposition to the Committee soon followed the Left down the ways to dusty death, and the execution of the Anarchists only preceded by a week the arrest of the Moderates. When the seizure of Danton had once before been discussed in the Committee, Robespierre resisted the proposal violently. We have already seen how he defended Danton at the Jacobin Club, when the Club underwent the process of purification in the winter. What produced this sudden tack? How came Robespierre

to assent in March to a violence which he had angrily discountenanced in February? There had been no change in the policy or attitude of Danton himself. The military operations against the domestic and foreign enemies were no sooner fairly in the way of success, than Danton began to meditate in serious earnest the consolidation of a republican system of law and justice. He would fain have stayed the Terror. 'Let us leave something,' he said, 'to the guillotine of opinion.' He aided, no doubt, in the formation of the Revolutionary Tribunal, but this was exactly in harmony with his usual policy of controlling popular violence without alienating the strength of popular sympathy. The process of the tribunal was rough and summary, but it was fairer—until Robespierre's Law of Prairial—than people usually suppose, and it was the very temple of the goddess of Justice herself compared with the September massacres. 'Let us prove ourselves terrible,' Danton said, 'to relieve the people from the necessity of being so.' His activity had been incessant in urging and superintending the great levies against the foreigner; he had gone repeatedly on distant and harassing expeditions, as the representative of the Convention at the camps on the frontier. In the midst of all this he found time to press forward measures for the instruction of the young, and for the due appointment of judges, and his head was full of ideas for the construction of a permanent executive council. It was this which made him eager for a cessation of the method of Terror, and it was this which made the Committee of Public Safety his implacable enemy.

Why, then, did Robespierre, who also passed as a man of order and humanity, not continue to support Danton after the suppression of the Hébertists, as he had supported him before? The common and facile answer is that he was moved by a

malignant desire to put a rival out of the way. On the whole, the evidence seems to support Napoleon's opinion, that Robespierre was incapable of voting for the death of anybody in the world on grounds of personal enmity. And his acquiescence in the ruin of Danton is intelligible enough on the grounds of selfish policy. The Committee hated Danton for the good reason that he had openly attacked them, and his cry for clemency was an inflammatory and dangerous protest against their system. Now Robespierre, rightly or wrongly, had made up his mind that the Committee was the instrument by which, and which only, he could work out his own vague schemes of power and reconstruction. And, in any case, how could he resist the Committee? The famous insurrectionary force of Paris, which Danton had been the first to organize against a government, had just been chilled by the fall of the Hébertists. Least of all could this force be relied upon to rise in defence of the very chief whose every word for many weeks past had been a protest against the Communal leaders. In separating himself from the Ultras, Danton had cut off the great reservoir of his peculiar strength.

It may be said that the Convention was the proper centre of resistance to the designs of the Committee, and that if Danton and Robespierre had united their forces in the Convention, they would have defeated Billaud and his allies. This seems to us more than doubtful. The Committee had acquired an immense preponderance over the Convention. They had been eminently successful in the immense tasks imposed upon them. They had the prestige not only of being the government—so great a thing in a country that had just emerged from the condition of a centralized monarchy; they had also the prestige of being a government that had done its work triumphantly. We are now in March. In July we shall find

that Robespierre adopted the very policy that we are now discussing, of playing off the Convention against the Committee. In July that policy ended in his headlong fall. Why should it have been any more successful four months earlier?

What we may say is, that Robespierre was bound in all morality to defend Danton in the Convention at every hazard. Possibly so; but then to run risks for chivalry's sake was not in Robespierre's nature, and no man can climb out beyond the limitations of his own character. His narrow head and thin blood and instable nerve, his calculating humour and his frigid egoism, disinclined him to all games of chance. His apologists have sought to put a more respectable colour on his abandonment of Danton. The precisian, they say, disapproved of Danton's lax and heedless courses. Danton said to him one day:—'What do I care? Public opinion is a strumpet, and posterity a piece of nonsense.' How should the puritanical lawyer endure such cynicism as this? And Danton delighted in inflicting these coarse shocks. Again, Danton had given various gross names of contempt to Saint Just. Was Robespierre not to feel insults offered to the ablest and most devoted of his lieutenants? What was more important than all, the acclamations with which the partisans of reaction greeted the fall of the Ultras, made it necessary to give instant and unmistakable notice to the foes of the Revolution that the goddess of the scorching eye and fiery hand still grasped the axe of her vengeance.

These are pleas invented after the fact. All goes to show that Robespierre was really moved by nothing more than his invariable dread of being left behind, of finding himself on the weaker side, of not seeming practical and political enough. And having made up his mind that the stronger party was

bent on the destruction of the Dantonists, he became fiercer than Billaud himself. It is constantly seen that the waverer, of nervous atrabiliar constitution, no sooner overcomes the agony of irresolution, than he flings himself on his object with a vindictive tenacity, that seems to repay him for all the moral humiliation inflicted on him by his stifled doubts. He redeems the slowness of his approach by the fury of his spring. 'Robespierre,' says M. D'Héricault, 'precipitated himself to the front of the opinion that was yelling against his friends of yesterday. In order to keep his usual post in the van of the Revolution, in order to secure the advantage to his own popularity of an execution which the public voice seemed to demand, he came forward as the author of that execution, though only the day before he had hesitated about its utility, and though it was, in truth, far less useful to him than it proved to be to his future antagonists.'

Robespierre first alarmed Danton's friends by assuming a certain icy coldness of manner, and by some menacing phrases about the faction of the so-called Moderates. Danton had gone, as he often did, to his native village of Arcis-sur-Aube, to seek repose and a little clearness of sight in the night that wrapped him about. He was devoid of personal ambition; he never had any humour for mere factious struggles. His, again, was the temperament of violent force, and in such types the reaction is always tremendous. The indomitable activity of the last twenty months had bred weariness of spirit. The nemesis of a career of strenuous Will in large natures is apt to be a sudden sense of the irony of things. In Danton, as with Byron it happened afterwards, the vehemence of the revolutionary spirit was touched by this desolating irony. His friends tried to rouse him. It is not clear that he could have done anything. The balance of force, after the suppression of the

Hébertists, was irretrievably against him, as calculation had already revealed to Robespierre.

There are various stories of the pair having met at dinner almost on the eve of Danton's arrest, and parting with sombre disquietude on both sides. The interview, with its champagne, its interlocutors, its play of sinister repartee, may possibly have taken place, but the alleged details are plainly apocryphal. After all, 'Religion ist in der Thiere Trieb,' says Wallenstein; 'the very savage drinks not with the victim, into whose breast he means to plunge a sword.' Danton was warned that Robespierre was plotting his arrest. 'If I thought he had the bare idea,' said Danton with something of Gargantuan hyperbole, 'I would eat his bowels out.' Such was the disdain with which the 'giant of the mighty bone and bold emprise' thought of our meagre-hearted pedant. The truth is that in the stormy and distracted times of politics, and perhaps in all times, contempt is a dangerous luxury. A man may be a very poor creature, and still have a faculty for mischief. And Robespierre had this faculty in the case of Danton. With singular baseness, he handed over to Saint Just a collection of notes, to serve as material for the indictment which Saint Just was to present to the Convention. They comprised everything that suspicion could interpret malignantly, from the most conspicuous acts of Danton's public life, down to the casual freedom of private discourse.

Another infamy was to follow. After the arrest, and on the proceedings to obtain the assent of the Convention to the trial of Danton and others of its members, one only of their friends had the courage to rise and demand that they should be heard at the bar. Robespierre burst out in cold rage; he asked whether they had undergone so many heroic sacrifices, counting among them these acts of 'painful severity,' only to fall under

the yoke of a band of domineering intriguers; and he cried out impatiently that they would brook no claim of privilege, and suffer no rotten idol. The word was felicitously chosen, for the Convention dreaded to have its independence suspected, and it dreaded this all the more because at this time its independence did not really exist. The vote against Danton was unanimous, and the fact that it was so is the deepest stain on the fame of this assembly. On the afternoon of the Sixteenth Germinal (April 5, 1794) Paris in amazement and some stupefaction saw the once-dreaded Titan of the Mountain fast bound in the tumbril, and faring towards the sharp-clanging knife. 'I leave it all in a frightful welter,' Danton is reported to have said. 'Not a man of them has an idea of government. Robespierre will follow me; he is dragged down by me. Ah, better be a poor fisherman, than meddle with the governing of men!'

Let us pause for a moment over a calmer reminiscence. This was the very day on which the virtuous and high-minded Condorcet quitted the friendly roof that for nine months had concealed him from the search of proscription. The same week he was found dead in his prison. While Danton was storming with impotent thunder before the tribunal, Condorcet was writing those closing words of his Sketch of Human Progress, which are always so full of strength and edification. 'How this picture of the human race freed from all its fetters,—withdrawn from the empire of chance, as from that of the enemies of progress, and walking with firm and assured step in the way of truth, of virtue, and happiness, presents to the philosopher a sight that consoles him for the errors, the crimes, the injustice, with which the earth is yet stained, and of which he is not seldom the victim! It is in the contemplation of this

picture that he receives the reward of his efforts for the progress of reason, for the defence of liberty. He ventures to link them with the eternal chain of the destinies of man: it is there he finds the true recompense of virtue, the pleasure of having done a lasting good; fate can no longer undo it, by any disastrous compensation that shall restore prejudice and bondage. This contemplation is for him a refuge, into which the recollection of his persecutors can never follow him; in which, living in thought with man reinstated in the rights and the dignity of his nature, he forgets man tormented and corrupted by greed, by base fear, by envy; it is here that he truly abides with his fellows, in an elysium that his reason has known how to create for itself, and that his love for humanity adorns with all purest delights.'

In following the turns of the drama which was to end in the tragedy of Thermidor, we perceive that after the fall of the anarchists and the death of Danton, the relations between Robespierre and the Committees underwent a change. He, who had hitherto been on the side of government, became in turn an agency of opposition. He did this in the interest of ultimate stability, but the difference between the new position and the old is that he now distinctly associated the idea of a stable republic with the ascendancy of his own religious conceptions. How far the ascendancy of his own personality was involved, we have no means of judging. The vulgar accusation against him is that he now deliberately aimed at a dictatorship, and began to plot with that end in view. It is always the most difficult thing in the world to draw a line between mere arrogant egoism on the one hand, and on the other the identification of a man's personal elevation with the success of his public cause. The two ends probably become mixed in his

mind, and if the cause be a good one, it is the height of pharisaical folly to quarrel with him, because he desires that his authority and renown shall receive some of the lustre of a far-shining triumph. What we complain of in Napoleon Bonaparte, for instance, is not that he sought power, but that he sought it in the interests of a coarse, brutal, and essentially unmeaning personal ambition. And so of Robespierre. We need not discuss the charge that he sought to make himself master. The important thing is that his mastery could have served no great end for France; that it would have been like himself, poor, barren, and hopelessly mediocre. And this would have been seen on every side. France had important military tasks to perform before her independence was assured. Robespierre hated war, and was jealous of every victory. France was in urgent need of stable government, of new laws, of ordered institutions. Robespierre never said a word to indicate that he had a single positive idea in his head on any of these great departments. And, more than this, he was incapable of making use of men who were more happily endowed than himself. He had never mastered that excellent observation of De Retz, that of all the qualities of a good party chief, none is so indispensable as being able to suppress on many occasions, and to hide on all, even legitimate suspicions. He was corroded by suspicion, and this paralyses able servants. Finally, Robespierre had no imperial quality of soul, but only that very sorry imitation of it, a lively irritability.

The base of Robespierre's schemes of social reconstruction now came clearly into view; and what a base! An official Supreme Being, and a regulated Terror. The one was to fill up the spiritual void, and the other to satisfy all the exigencies of temporal things. It is to the credit of Robespierre's perspicacity that he should have recognized the human craving for

religion, but this credit is as naught when we contemplate the jejune thing that passed for religion in his dim and narrow understanding. Rousseau had brought a new soul into the eighteenth century by the Savoyard Vicar's Profession of Faith, the most fervid and exalted expression of emotional deism that religious literature contains; vague, irrational, incoherent, cloudy; but the clouds are suffused with glowing gold. When we turn from that to the political version of it in Robespierre's discourse on the relations of religious and moral ideas with republican principles, we feel as one who revisits a landscape that had been made glorious to him by a summer sky and fresh liquid winds from the gates of the evening sun, only to find it dead under a grey heaven and harsh blasts from the north-east. Robespierre's words on the Supreme Being are never a brimming stream of deep feeling; they are a literary concoction: never the self-forgetting expansion of the religious soul, but only the composite of the rhetorician. He thought he had a passion for religion; what he took for religion was little more than mental decorum. We do not mean that he was insincere, or that he was without a feeling for high things. But here, as in all else, his aspiration was far beyond his faculty; he yearned for great spiritual emotions, as he had yearned for great thoughts and great achievements, but his spiritual capacity was as scanty and obscure as his intelligence. And where unkind Nature thus unequally yokes lofty objects in a man with a short mental reach, she stamps him with the very definition of mediocrity.

How can we speak with decent patience of a man who seriously thought that he should conciliate the conservative and theological elements of the society at his feet, by such an odious opera-piece as the Feast of the Supreme Being? This was designed as a triumphant ripost to the Feast of

Reason, which Chaumette and his friends had celebrated in the winter. The energumens of the Goddess of Reason had now been some weeks in their bloody graves; by this time, if they had given the wrong answer to the supreme enigma, their eyes would perhaps be opened. Robespierre persuaded the Convention to decree an official recognition of the Supreme Being, and to attend a commemorative festival in honour of their mystic patron. He contrived to be chosen president for the decade in which the festival would fall. When the day came (20th Prairial, June 8, 1794), he clothed himself with more than even his usual care. As he looked out from the windows of the Tuileries upon the jubilant crowd in the gardens, he was intoxicated with enthusiasm. 'O Nature,' he cried, 'how sublime thy power, how full of delight! How tyrants must grow pale at the idea of such a festival as this!' In pontifical pride he walked at the head of the procession, with flowers and wheat-ears in his hand, to the sound of chants and symphonies and choruses of maidens. On the first of the great basins in the gardens, David, the artist, had devised an allegorical structure for which an inauspicious doom was prepared. Atheism, a statue of life size, was throned in the midst of an amiable group of human Vices, with Madness by her side, and Wisdom menacing them with lofty wrath. Great are the perils of symbolism. Robespierre applied a torch to Atheism, but alas, the wind was hostile, or else Atheism and Madness were damp. They obstinately resisted the torch, and it was hapless Wisdom who took fire. Her face, all blackened by smoke, grinned a hideous ghastly grin at her sturdy rivals. The miscarriage of the allegory was an evil omen, and men probably thought how much better the churchmen always managed their conjurings and the art of spectacle. There was a great car drawn by milk-white oxen; in the front were ranged sheaves of golden

grain, while at the back shepherds and shepherdesses posed with scenic graces. The whole mummery was pagan. It was a bringing back of Cerealia and Thesmophoria to earth. It stands as the most disgusting and contemptible anachronism in history.

The famous republican Calendar, with it Prairials and Germinals, its Ventoses and Pluvioses, was an anachronism of the same kind, though it was less despicable in its manifestation. Its philosophic base was just as retrograde and out of season as the fooleries of the Feast of the Supreme Being. The association of worship and sacredness with the fruits of the earth, with the forces of nature, with the power and variety of the elements, could only be sincere so long as men really thought of all these things as animated each by a special will of its own. Such an association became mere charlatanry, when knowledge once passed into the positive stage. How could men go back to adore an outer world, after they had found out the secret that it is a mere huge group of phenomena, following fixed courses, and not obeying spontaneous and unaccountable volitions of their own? And what could be more puerile than the fanciful connection of the Supreme Being with a pastoral simplicity of life? This simplicity was gone, irrecoverably gone, with the passage from nomad times to the complexities of a modern society. To typify, therefore, the Supreme Being as specially interested in shocks of grain and in shepherds and shepherdesses was to make him a mere figure in an idyll, the ornament of a rural mask, a god of the garden, instead of the sovereign director of the universal forces, and stern master of the destinies of men. Chaumette's commemoration of the Divinity of Reason was a sensible performance, compared with Robespierre's farcical repartee. It was something, as Comte has said, to select for worship man's

most individual attribute. If they could not contemplate society as a whole, it was at least a gain to pay homage to that faculty in the human rulers of the world, which had brought the forces of nature,—its pluviosity, nivosity, germinality, and vendemiarity,—under the yoke for the service of men.

If the philosophy of Robespierre's pageant was so retrograde and false, its politics were still more inane. It is a monument of presumptuous infatuation that any one should feel so strongly as he did that order could only be restored on condition of coming to terms with religious use and prejudice, and then that he should dream that his Supreme Being—a mere didactic phrase, the deity of a poet's georgic—should adequately replace that eternal marvel of construction, by means of which the great churchmen had wrought dogma and liturgy and priest and holy office into every hour and every mood of men's lives. There is no binding principle of human association in a creed with this one bald article. 'In truth,' as I have said elsewhere of such deism as Robespierre's, 'one can scarcely call it a creed. It is mainly a name for a particular mood of fine spiritual exaltation; the expression of a state of indefinite aspiration and supreme feeling for lofty things. Are you going to convert the new barbarians of our western world with this fair word of emptiness? Will you sweeten the lives of suffering men, and take its heaviness from that drolling piteous chronicle of wrong and cruelty and despair, which everlastingly saddens the compassionating ear like moaning of a midnight sea; will you animate the stout of heart with new fire, and the firm of hand with fresh joy of battle, by the thought of a being without intelligible attributes, a mere abstract creation of metaphysic, whose mercy is not as our mercy, nor his justice as our justice, nor his fatherhood as the fatherhood of men? It was not by a cold, a

cheerless, a radically depraving conception such as this, that the church became the refuge of humanity in the dark times of old, but by the representation, to men sitting in bondage and confusion, of godlike natures moving among them, under figure of the most eternally touching of human relations,—a tender mother ever interceding for them, and an elder brother laying down his life that their burdens might be loosened.'

On the day of the Feast of the Supreme Being, the guillotine was concealed in the folds of rich hangings. It was the Twentieth of Prairial. Two days later Couthon proposed to the Convention the memorable Law of the Twenty-second Prairial. Robespierre was the draftsman, and the text of it still remains in his own writing. This monstrous law is simply the complete abrogation of all law. Of all laws ever passed in the world it is the most nakedly iniquitous. Tyrants have often substituted their own will for the ordered procedure of a tribunal, but no tyrant before ever went through the atrocious farce of deliberately making a tribunal the organized negation of security for justice. Couthon laid its theoretic base in a fallacy that must always be full of seduction to shallow persons in authority: 'He who would subordinate the public safety to the inventions of jurisconsults, to the formulas of the Court, is either an imbecile or a scoundrel.' As if public safety could mean anything but the safety of the public. The author of the Law of Prairial had forgotten the minatory word of the sage to whom he had gone on a pilgrimage in the days of his youth. 'All becomes legitimate and even virtuous,' Helvétius had written, 'on behalf of the public safety.' Rousseau inscribed on the margin, 'The public safety is nothing, unless individuals enjoy security.' What security was possible under the Law of Prairial?

After the probity and good judgment of the tribunal, the two cardinal guarantees in state trials are accurate definition, and proof. The offence must be capable of precise description, and the proof against an offender must conform to strict rule. The Law of Prairial violently infringed all three of these essential conditions of judicial equity. First, the number of the jury who had power to convict was reduced. Second, treason was made to consist in such vague and infinitely elastic kinds of action as inspiring discouragement, misleading opinion, depraving manners, corrupting patriots, abusing the principles of the Revolution by perfidious applications. Third, proof was to lie in the conscience of the jury; there was an end of preliminary inquiry, of witnesses in defence, and of counsel for the accused. Any kind of testimony was evidence, whether material or moral, verbal or written, if it was of a kind 'likely to gain the assent of a man of reasonable mind.'

Now what was Robespierre's motive in devising this infernal instrument? The theory that he loved judicial murder for its own sake, can only be held by the silliest of royalist or clerical partizans. It is like the theory of the vulgar kind of Protestantism, that Mary Tudor or Philip of Spain had a keen delight in shedding blood. Robespierre, like Mary and like Philip, would have been as well pleased if all the world would have come round to his mind without the destruction of a single life. The true inquisitor is a creature of policy, not a man of blood by taste. What, then, was the policy that inspired the Law of Prairial? To us the answer seems clear. We know what was the general aim in Robespierre's mind at this point in the history of the Revolution. His brother Augustin was then the representative of the Convention with the army of Italy, and General Bonaparte was on terms of close intimacy with him. Bonaparte said long afterwards,

when he was expiating a life of iniquity on the rock of Saint Helena, that he saw long letters from Maximilian to Augustin Robespierre, all blaming the Conventional Commissioners—Tallien, Fouché, Barras, Collot, and the rest—for the horrors they perpetrated, and accusing them of ruining the Revolution by their atrocities. Again, there is abundant testimony that Robespierre did his best to induce the Committee of Public Safety to bring those odious malefactors to justice. The text of the Law itself discloses the same object. The vague phrases of depraving manners and applying revolutionary principles perfidiously, were exactly calculated to smite the band of violent men whose conduct was to Robespierre the scandal of the Revolution. And there was a curious clause in the law as originally presented, which deprived the Convention of the right of preventing measures against its own members. Robespierre's general design in short was to effect a further purgation of the Convention. There is no reason to suppose that he deliberately aimed at any more general extermination. On the other hand, it is incredible that, as some have maintained, he should merely have had in view the equalisation of rich and poor before the tribunals, by withdrawing the aid of counsel and testimony to civic character from both rich and poor alike.

If Robespierre's design was what we believe it to have been, the result was a ghastly failure. The Committee of Public Safety would not consent to apply his law against the men for whom he had specially designed it. The frightful weapon which he had forged was seized by the Committee of General Security, and Paris was plunged into the fearful days of the Great Terror. The number of persons put to death by the Revolutionary Tribunal before the Law of Prairial had been comparatively moderate. From the creation of the tribunal

in April 1793, down to the execution of the Hébertists in March 1794, the number of persons condemned to death was 505. From the death of the Hébertists down to the death of Robespierre, the number of the condemned was 2158. One half of the entire number of victims, namely, 1356, were guillotined after the Law of Prairial. No deadlier instrument was ever invented by the cruelty of man. Innocent women no less than innocent men, poor no less than rich, those in whom life was almost spent, no less than those in whom its pulse was strongest, virtuous no less than vicious, were sent off in woe-stricken batches all those summer days. A man was informed against; he was seized in his bed at five in the morning; at seven he was taken to the Conciergerie; at nine he received information of the charge against him; at ten he went into the dock; by two in the afternoon he was condemned; by four his head lay in the executioner's basket.

What stamps the system of the Terror at this date with a wickedness that cannot be effaced, is that at no moment was the danger from foreign or domestic foe less serious. We may always forgive something to well-grounded panic. The proscriptions of an earlier date in Paris were not excessively sanguinary, if we remember that the city abounded in royalists and other reactionists, who were really dangerous in fomenting discouragement and spreading confusion. If there ever is an excuse for martial law, and it must be rare, the French government were warranted in resorting to it in 1793. Paris in those days was like a city beleaguered, and the world does not use very harsh words about the commandant of a besieged town who puts to death traitors found within his walls. Opinion in England at this very epoch encouraged the Tory government to pass a Treason Bill, which introduced as vague a definition of treasonable offence as even the Law of Prairial

itself. Windham did not shrink from declaring in parliament that he and his colleagues were determined to exact 'a rigour beyond the law.' And they were as good as their word. The Jacobins had no monopoly either of cruel law or cruel breach of law in the eighteenth century. Only thirty years before, opinion in Pennsylvania had prompted a hideous massacre of harmless Indians as a deed acceptable to God, and the grandson of William Penn proclaimed a bounty of fifty dollars for the scalp of a female Indian, and three times as much for a male. A man would have had quite as good a chance of justice from the Revolutionary Tribunal, as at the hands of Braxfield, the Scotch judge, who condemned Muir and Palmer for sedition in 1793, and who told the government, with a brazen front worthy of Carrier or Collot d'Herbois themselves, that, if they would only send him prisoners, he would find law for them.

We have no sympathy with the spirit of paradox that has arisen in these days, amusing itself by the vindication of bad men. We think that the author of the Law of Prairial was a bad man. But it is time that there should be an end of the cant which lifts up its hands at the crimes of republicans and freethinkers, and shuts its eyes to the crimes of kings and churches. Once more, we ought to rise into a higher air; we ought to condemn, wherever we find it, whether on the side of our adversaries or on our own, all readiness to substitute arbitrary force for the processes of ordered justice. There are moments when such a readiness may be leniently judged, but Prairial of 1794 was not one of them either in France or in England. And what makes the crime of this law more odious, is its association with the official proclamation of the State worship of a Supreme Being. The scene of Robespierre's holy festival becomes as abominable as a catholic Auto-da-fé,

where solemn homage was offered to the God of pity and loving-kindness, while flame glowed round the limbs of the victims.

Robespierre was inflamed with resentment, not because so many people were guillotined every day, but because the objects of his own enmity were not among them. He was chagrined at the miscarriage of his scheme; but the chagrin had its root in his desire for order, and not in his humanity. A good man—say so imperfectly good a man as Danton—could not have endured life, after enacting such a law, and seeing the ghastly work that it was doing. He could hardly have contented himself with drawing tears from the company in Madame Duplay's little parlour, by his pathetic recitations from Corneille and Racine, or with listening to melting notes from the violin of Le Bas. It is commonly said by Robespierre's defenders that he withdrew from the Committee of Public Safety, as soon as he found out that he was powerless to arrest the daily shedding of blood. The older assumption used to be that he left Paris, and ceased to be cognizant of the Committee's deliberations. The minutes, however, prove that this was not the case. Robespierre signed papers nearly every day of Messidor—(June 19 to July 18) the bloodstained month between Prairial and Thermidor—and was thoroughly aware of the doings of the Committee. His partisans have now fallen back on the singular theory of what they style moral absence. He was present in the flesh, but standing aloof in the spirit. His frowning silence was a deadlier rebuke to the slayers and oppressors than secession. Unfortunately for this ingenious explanation of the embarrassing fact of a merciful man standing silent before merciless doings, there are at least two facts that show its absurdity.

First, there is the affair of Catherine Théot. Catherine Théot was a crazy old woman of a type that is commoner in protestant than in catholic countries. She believed herself to have special gifts in the interpretation of the holy writings, and a few other people as crazy as herself chose to accept her pretensions. One revelation vouchsafed to her was to the effect that Robespierre was a Messiah and the new redeemer of the human race. The Committee of General Security resolved to indict this absurd sect. Vadier,—one of the roughest of the men whom the insurrections of Paris had brought to the front—reported on the charges to the Convention (27 Prairial, June 15), and he took the opportunity to make Robespierre look profoundly ridiculous. The unfortunate Messiah sat on his bench, gnawing his lips with bitter rage, while, amid the sneers and laughter of the Convention, the officers brought to the bar the foolish creatures who had called him the Son of God. His thin pride and prudish self-respect were unutterably affronted, and he quite understood that the ridicule of the mysticism of Théot was an indirect pleasantry upon his own Supreme Being. He flew to the Committee of Public Safety, angrily reproached them for permitting the prosecution, summoned Fouquier-Tinville, and peremptorily ordered him to let the matter drop. In vain did the public prosecutor point out that there was a decree of the Convention ordering him to proceed. Robespierre was inexorable. The Committee of General Security were baffled, and the prosecution ended. 'Lutteur impuissant et fatigué,' says M. Hamel, the most thoroughgoing defender of Robespierre, upon this, 'il va se retirer, moralement du moins.' Impotent and wearied! But he had just won a most signal victory for good sense and humanity. Why was it the only one? If Robespierre was able to save Théot, why could he not save Cécile Renault?

Cécile Renault was a young seamstress who was found one evening at the door of Robespierre's lodging, calling out in a state of exaltation that she would fain see what a tyrant looked like. She was arrested, and upon her were found two little knives used for the purposes of her trade. That she should be arrested and imprisoned was natural enough. The times were charged with deadly fire. People had not forgotten that Marat had been murdered in his own house. Only a few days before Cécile Renault's visit to Robespierre, an assassin had fired a pistol at Collot d'Herbois on the staircase of his apartment. We may make allowance for the excitement of the hour, and Robespierre had as much right to play the martyr, as had Lewis the Fifteenth after the incident of Damiens' rusty pen-knife. But the histrionic exigencies of the chief of a faction ought not to be pushed too far. And it was a monstrous crime that because Robespierre found it convenient to pose as sacrificial victim at the Club, therefore he should have had no scruple in seeing not only the wretched Cécile, but her father, her aunt, and one of her brothers, all dispatched to the guillotine in the red shirt of parricide, as agents of Pitt and Coburg, and assassins of the father of the land. This was exactly two days after he had shown his decisive power in the affair of the religious illuminists. The only possible conclusion open to a plain man after weighing and putting aside all the sophisms with which this affair has been obscured, is that Robespierre interfered in the one case because its further prosecution would have tended to make him ridiculous, and he did not interfere in the other, because the more exaggerated, the more melodramatic, the more murderous it was made, the more interesting an object would he seem in the eyes of his adorers.

The second fact bearing on Robespierre's humanity is this.

He had encouraged the formation and stimulated the activity of popular commissions, who should provide victims for the Revolutionary Tribunal. On the Second of Messidor (June 20) a list containing one hundred and thirty-eight names was submitted for the ratification of the Committee. The Committee endorsed the bloody document, and the last signature of the endorsement is that of him, who had resigned a post in his youth rather than be a party to putting a man to death. As was observed at the time, Robespierre in doing this, suppressed his pique against his colleagues, in order to take part in a measure, that was a sort of complement to his Law of Prairial.

From these two circumstances, then, even if there were no other, we are justified in inferring that Robespierre was struck by no remorse at the thought that it was his law which had unbound the hands of the horrible genie of civil murder. His mind was wholly absorbed in the calculations of a frigid egoism. His intelligence, as we have always to remember, was very dim. He only aimed at one thing at once, and that was seldom anything very great or far-reaching. He was a man of peering and obscured vision in face of practical affairs. In passing the Law of Prairial, his designs—and they were meritorious and creditable designs enough in themselves—had been directed against the corrupt chiefs, such as Tallien and Fouché, and against the fierce and coarse spirits of the Committee of General Security, such as Vadier and Voulland. Robespierre was above all things a precisian. He had a sentimental sympathy with the common people in the abstract, but his spiritual pride, his pedantry, his formalism, his personal fastidiousness, were all wounded to the very quick by the kind of men whom the Revolution had thrown to the surface. Governeur Morris, then the American minister, describes most of the members

of the two Committees as the very dregs of humanity, with whom it is a stain to have any dealings; as degraded men only worthy of the profoundest contempt. Danton had said: 'Robespierre is the least of a scoundrel of any of the band.' The Committee of General Security represented the very elements by which Robespierre was most revolted. They offended his respectability; their evil manners seemed to tarnish that good name which his vanity hoped to make as revered all over Europe, as it already was among his partisans in France. It was indispensable therefore to cut them off from the revolutionary government, just as Hébert and as Danton had been cut off. His colleagues of Public Safety refused to lend themselves to this. Henceforth, with characteristically narrow tenacity, he looked round for new combinations, but, so far as I can see, with no broader design than to enable him to punish these particular objects of his very just detestation.

The position of sections and interests which ended in the Revolution of Thermidor, is one of the most extraordinarily intricate and entangled in the history of faction. It would take a volume to follow out all the peripeteias of the drama. Here we can only enumerate in a few sentences the parties to the contest and the conditions of the game. The reader will easily discern the difficulty in Robespierre's way of making an effective combination. First, there were the two Committees. Of these the one, the General Security, was thoroughly hostile to Robespierre; its members, as we have said, were wild and hardy spirits, with no political conception, and with a great contempt for fine phrases and philosophical principles. They knew Robespierre's hatred for them, and they heartily returned it. They were the steadfast centre of the changing schemes which ended in his downfall. The Committee of Public Safety was divided. Carnot hated Saint

Just, and Collot d'Herbois hated Robespierre, and Billaud had a sombre distrust of Robespierre's counsels. Shortly speaking, the object of the Billaudists was to retain their power, and their power was always menaced from two quarters, the Convention and Paris. If they let Robespierre have his own way against his enemies, would they not be at his mercy whenever he chose to devise a popular insurrection against them? Yet if they withstood Robespierre, they could only do so through the agency of the Convention, and to fall back upon the Convention would be to give that body an express invitation to resume the power that had, in the pressure of the crisis a year before, been delegated to the Committee, and periodically renewed afterwards. The dilemma of Billaud seemed desperate, and events afterwards proved that it was so.

If we turn to the Convention, we find the position equally distracting. They, too, feared another insurrection and a second decimation. If the Right helped Robespierre to destroy the Fouchés and Vadiers, he would be stronger than ever; and what security had they against a repetition of the violence of the Thirty-first of May? If the Dantonists joined in destroying Robespierre, they would be helping the Right, and what security had they against a Girondin reaction? On the other hand, the Centre might fairly hope, just what Billaud feared, that if the Committee came to the Convention to crush Robespierre, that would end in a combination strong enough to enable the Convention to crush the Committees.

Much depended on military success. The victories of the generals were the great strength of the Committee. For so long it would be difficult to turn opinion against a triumphant administration. 'At the first defeat,' Robespierre had said to Barère, 'I await you.' But the defeat did not come. The plotting went on with incessant activity; on one hand, Robes-

pierre, aided by Saint Just and Couthon, strengthening himself at the Jacobin Club, and through that among the sections; on the other, the Mountain and the Committee of General Security trying to win over the Right, more contemptuously christened the Marsh or the Belly, of the Convention. The Committee of Public Safety was not yet fully decided how to act.

At the end of the first week of Thermidor, Robespierre could endure the tension no longer. He had tried to fortify his nerves for the struggle by riding, but with so little success that he was lifted off his horse fainting. He endeavoured to steady himself by diligent pistol-practice. But nothing gave him initiative and the sinews of action. Saint Just urged him to raise Paris. Some bold men proposed to carry off the members of the Committee bodily from their midnight deliberations. Robespierre declined, and fell back on what he took to be his greatest strength and most unfailing resource; he prepared a speech. On the Eighth of Thermidor he delivered it to the Convention, amid intense excitement both within its walls and without. All Paris knew that they were now on the eve of one more of the famous Days; the revolution of Thermidor had begun.

The speech of the Eighth Thermidor has seemed to men of all parties since a masterpiece of tactical ineptitude. If Robespierre had been a statesman instead of a phrasemonger, he had a clear course. He ought to have taken the line of argument that Danton would have taken. That is to say, he ought to have identified himself fully with the interests and security of the Convention; to have accepted the growing resolution to close the Terror; to have boldly pressed the abolition of the Committee of General Security, and the removal from the Committee of Public Safety of Billaud, Collot, Barère; to have proposed to send about fifty persons to Cayenne for life; and

to have urged a policy of peace with the foreign powers. This was the substantial wisdom and real interest of the position. The task was difficult, because his hearers had the best possible reasons for knowing that the author of the Law of Prairial was a Terrorist on principle. And in truth we know that Robespierre had no definite intention of erecting clemency into a rule. He had not mental strength enough to throw off the profound apprehension, which the incessant alarms of the last five years had engendered in him; and the only device, that he could imagine for maintaining the republic against traitors, was to stimulate the rigour of the Revolutionary Tribunal.

If, however, Robespierre lacked the grasp which might have made him the representative of a broad and stable policy, it was at least his interest to persuade the men of the Plain that he entertained no designs against them. And this is what in his own mind he intended. But to do it effectively, it was clearly best to tell his hearers, in so many words, whom he really wished them to strike. That would have relieved the majority, and banished the suspicion which had been busily fomented by his enemies, that he had in his pocket a long list of their names for proscription. But Robespierre, having for the first time in his life ventured on aggressive action without the support of a definite party, faltered. He dared not to designate his enemies face to face and by name. Instead of that, he talked vaguely of conspirators against the republic, and calumniators of himself. There was not a single bold, definite, unmistakable sentence in the speech from first to last. The men of the Plain were insecure and doubtful; they had no certainty that among conspirators and calumniators he did not include too many of themselves. People are not so readily seized by grand phrases, when their heads are at stake.

The sitting was long, and marked by changing currents and reverses. When they broke up, all was left uncertain. Robespierre had suffered a check. Billaud felt that he could no longer hesitate in joining the combination against his colleague. Each party was aware that the next day must seal the fate of one or other of them. There is a legend that in the evening Robespierre walked in the Champs Elysées with his betrothed, accompanied as usual by his faithful dog, Brount. They admired the purple of the sunset, and talked of the prospect of a glorious to-morrow. But this is apocryphal. The evening was passed in no lover's saunterings, but amid the storm and uproar of the Club. He went to the Jacobins to read over again his speech of the day. 'It is my testament of death,' he said, amid the passionate protestations of his devoted followers. He had been talking for the last three years of his willingness to drink the hemlock, and to offer his breast to the poniards of tyrants. That was a fashion of the speech of the time, and in earlier days it had been more than a fashion of speech, for Brunswick would have given them short shrift. But now, when he talked of his last testament, Robespierre did not intend it to be so if he could prevent it. When he went to rest that night, he had a tolerably calm hope that he should win the next day's battle in the Convention, when he was aware that Saint Just would attack the Committees openly and directly. If he would have allowed his band to invade the Pavillon de Flore, and carry off or slay the Committees who sat up through the night, the battle would have been won when he awoke. His friends are justified in saying that his strong respect for legality was the cause of his ruin.

Men in all ages have had a superstitious fondness for connecting awful events in their lives with portents and signs

among the outer elements. It was noticed that the heat during the terrible days of Thermidor was more intense than had been known within the memory of man. The thermometer never fell below sixty-five degrees in the coolest part of the night, and in the daytime men and women and beasts of burden fell down dead in the streets. By five o'clock in the morning of the Ninth Thermidor, the galleries of the Convention were filled by a boisterous and excited throng. At ten o'clock the proceedings began as usual with the reading of correspondence from the departments and from the armies. Robespierre, who had been escorted from his lodgings by the usual body of admirers, instead of taking his ordinary seat, remained standing by the side of the tribune. It is a familiar fact that moments of appalling suspense are precisely those in which we are most ready involuntarily to note a trifle; everybody observed that Robespierre wore the coat of violet-blue silk and the white nankeens in which a few weeks previously he had done honour to the Supreme Being.

The galleries seemed as enthusiastic as ever. The men of the Plain and the Marsh had lost the abject mien with which they usually cowered before Robespierre's glance; they wore a courageous air of judicial reserve. The leaders of the Mountain wandered restlessly to and fro among the corridors. At noon Tallien saw that Saint Just had ascended the tribune. Instantly he rushed down into the chamber, knowing that the battle had now begun in fierce earnest. Saint Just had not got through two sentences, before Tallien interrupted him. He began to insist with energy that there should be an end to the equivocal phrases with which Paris had been too long alarmed by the Triumvirate. Billaud, fearing to be outdone in the attack, hastily forced his way to the tribune, broke into what Tallien was saying, and proceeded dexterously to dis-

credit Robespierre's allies without at once assailing Robespierre himself. Le Bas ran in a fury to stop him; Collot d'Herbois, the president, declared Le Bas out of order; the hall rang with cries of 'To prison! To the Abbey!' and Le Bas was driven from the tribune. This was the beginning of the tempest. Robespierre's enemies knew that they were fighting for their lives, and this inspired them with a strong and resolute power that is always impressive in popular assemblies. He still thought himself secure. Billaud pursued his accusations. Robespierre, at last, unable to control himself, scaled the tribune. There suddenly burst forth from Tallien and his partisans vehement shouts of 'Down with the tyrant! down with the tyrant!' The galleries were swept by a wild frenzy of vague agitation; the president's bell poured loud incessant clanging into the tumult; the men of the Plain held themselves firm and silent; in the tribune raged ferocious groups, Tallien menacing Robespierre with a dagger, Billaud roaring out proposals to arrest this person and that, Robespierre gesticulating, threatening, yelling, shrieking. His enemies knew that if he were once allowed to get a hearing, his authority might even yet overawe the waverers. A penetrative word or a heroic gesture might lose them the day. The majority of the chamber still hesitated. They called for Barère, in whose adroit faculty for discovering the winning side they had the confidence of long experience. Robespierre, recovering some of his calm, and perceiving now that he had really to deal with a serious revolt, again asked to be heard before Barère. But the cries for Barère were louder than ever. Barère spoke, in a sense hostile to Robespierre, but warily and without naming him.

Then there was a momentary lull. The Plain was uncertain. The battle might even now turn either way. Robes-

pierre made another attempt to speak, but Tallien with intrepid fury broke out into a torrent of louder and more vehement invective. Robespierre's shrill voice was heard in disjected snatches, amidst the violent tones of Tallien, the yells of the president calling Robespierre to order, the murderous clanging of the bell. Then came that supreme hour of the struggle, whose tale has been so often told, when Robespierre turned from his old allies of the Mountain, and succeeded in shrieking out an appeal to the probity and virtue of the Right and the Plain. To his horror, even these despised men, after a slight movement, remained mute. Then his cheeks blanched, and the sweat ran down his face. But anger and scornful impatience swiftly came back and restored him. *President of assassins,* he cried out to Thuriot, *for the last time I ask to be heard. Thou canst not speak,* called one, *the blood of Danton chokes thee.* He flung himself down the steps of the tribune, and rushed towards the benches of the Right. *Come no further,* cried another, *Vergniaud and Condorcet sat here.* He regained the tribune, but his speech was gone. He was reduced to the dregs of an impotent and gasping voiceless gesticulation, like the strife of one in a nightmare.

The day was lost. The tension of a passionate and violent struggle prolonged for many hours always at length exasperates onlookers with something of the brute ferocity of the actors. The physical strain stirs the tiger in the blood; they conceive a cruel hatred against weakness, just as the heated throng of a Roman amphitheatre turned up their thumbs for the instant dispatch of the unfortunate swordsman who had been too ready to lower his arms. The Right, the Plain, even the galleries, despised the man who had succumbed. If Robespierre had possessed the physical strength of Mirabeau or Danton, the Ninth Thermidor would have been another of his victories.

He was crushed by the relentless ferocity and endurance of his antagonists. A decree for his arrest was resolved upon by acclamation. He cast a glance at the galleries, as marvelling that they should remain passive in face of an outrage on his person. They were mute. The ushers advanced with hesitation to do their duty, and not without trembling carried him away, along with Couthon and Saint Just. The brother, for whom he had made honourable sacrifices in days that seemed to be divided from the present by an abyss of centuries, insisted with fine heroism on sharing his fate, and Augustin Robespierre and Le Bas were led off to the prisons along with their leader and idol.

It was now a little after four o'clock. The Convention with the self-possession that so often amazes us in its proceedings, went on with formal business for another hour. At five they broke up. For life, as the poets tell, is a daily stage-play; men declaim their high heroic parts, then doff the buskin or the sock, wash away the paint from their cheeks, and gravely sit down to meat. The Conventionals, as they ate their dinners, were unconscious apparently that the great crisis of the drama was still to come. The next twelve hours were to witness the climax. Robespierre had been crushed by the Convention: it remained to be seen whether the Convention would not now be crushed by the Commune of Paris.

Robespierre was first conducted to the prisons of the Luxembourg. The gaoler, on some plea of informality, refused to receive him. The terrible prisoner was next taken to the Mairie, where he remained among joyful friends from eight in the evening until eleven. Meanwhile the old insurrectionary methods of the nights of June and of August in '92, of May and of June in '93, were again followed. The beating of the *rappel* and the *générale* was heard in all the sections; the

tocsin sounded its dreadful note, reminding all who should hear it that insurrection is the most sacred and the most indispensable of duties. Hanriot, the commandant of the forces, had been arrested in the evening, but he was speedily released by the agents of the Commune. The Council issued manifestoes and decrees from the Common Hall every moment. The barriers were closed. Cannon were posted opposite the doors of the hall of the Convention. The quays were thronged. Emissaries sped to and fro between the Jacobin Club and the Common Hall, and between these two centres and each of the forty-eight sections. It is one of the inscrutable mysteries of this delirious night, that Hanriot did not at once use the force at his command to break up the Convention. There is no obvious reason why he should not have done so. The members of the Convention had re-assembled after their dinner, towards seven o'clock. The hall which had resounded with the shrieks and yells of the furious gladiators of the factions all day, now lent a lugubrious echo to gloomy reports which one member after another delivered from the shadow of the tribune. Towards nine o'clock the members of the two dread Committees came in panic to seek shelter among their colleagues, 'as dejected in their peril,' says an eyewitness, 'as they had been cruel and insolent in the hour of their supremacy.' When they heard that Hanriot had been released, and that guns were at their door, all gave themselves up for lost and made ready for death. News came that Robespierre had broken his arrest, and gone to the Common Hall. Robespierre, after urgent and repeated solicitations, had been at length persuaded about an hour before midnight to leave the Mairie and join his partisans of the Commune. This was an act of revolt against the Convention, for the Mairie was a legal place of detention, and so long as he was there, he was within the

law. The Convention with heroic intrepidity declared both Hanriot and Robespierre beyond the pale of the law. This prompt measure was its salvation. Twelve members were instantly named to carry the decree to all the sections. With the scarf of office round their waists, and a sabre in hand, they sallied forth. Mounting horses, and escorted by attendants with flaring torches, they scoured Paris, calling all good citizens to the succour of the Convention, haranguing crowds at the street corners with power and authority, and striking the imaginations of men. At midnight heavy rain began to fall.

The leaders of the Commune meanwhile, in full confidence that victory was sure, contented themselves with incessant issue of paper decrees, to each of which the Convention replied by a counter-decree. Those who have studied the situation most minutely, are of opinion that even so late as one o'clock in the morning, the Commune might have made a successful defence, although it had lost the opportunity, which it had certainly possessed up to ten o'clock, of destroying the Convention. But on this occasion the genius of insurrection slumbered. And there was a genuine division of opinion in the eastern quarters of Paris, the result of a grim distrust of the man who had helped to slay Hébert and Chaumette. At a word this distrust began to declare itself. The opinion of the sections became more and more distracted. One armed group cried, *Down with the Convention!* Another armed group cried, *The Convention for ever, and down with the Commune!* The two great faubourgs were all astir, and three battalions were ready to march. Emissaries from the Convention actually succeeded in persuading them—such the dementia of the night—that Robespierre was a royalist agent, and that the Commune were about to deliver the little Lewis from his prison in the

Temple. One body of communist partisans after another was detached from its allegiance. The deluge of rain emptied the Place de Grève, and when companies came up from the sections in obedience to orders from Hanriot and the Commune, the silence made them suspect a trap, and they withdrew towards the great metropolitan church or elsewhere.

Barras, whom the Convention had charged with its military defence, gathered together some six thousand men. With the right instinct of a man who had studied the history of Paris since the July of 1789, he foresaw the advantage of being the first to make the attack. He arranged his forces into two divisions. One of them marched along the quays to take the Common Hall in front; the other along the Rue Saint Honoré to take it in flank. Inside the Common Hall the staircases and corridors were alive with bustling messengers, and those mysterious busybodies who are always found lingering without a purpose on the skirts of great historic scenes. Robespierre and the other chiefs were in a small room, preparing manifestoes and signing decrees. They were curiously unaware of the movements of the Convention. An aggressive attack by the party of authority upon the party of insurrection was unknown in the tradition of revolt. They had an easy assurance that at daybreak their forces would be prepared once more to tramp along the familiar road westwards. It was now half-past two. Robespierre had just signed the first two letters of his name to a document before him, when he was startled by cries and uproar in the Place below. In a few instants he lay stretched on the ground, his jaw shattered by a pistol-shot. His brother had either fallen or had leaped out of the window. Couthon was hurled over a staircase, and lay for dead. Saint Just was a prisoner.

Whether Robespierre was shot by an officer of the Con-

ventional force, or attempted to blow out his own brains, we shall never know, any more than we shall ever be quite assured how Rousseau, his spiritual master, came to an end. The wounded man was carried, a ghastly sight, first to the Committee of Public Safety, and then to the Conciergerie, where he lay in silent stupefaction through the heat of the summer day. As he was an outlaw, the only legal preliminary before execution was to identify him. At five in the afternoon, he was raised into the cart. Couthon and the younger Robespierre lay, confused wrecks of men, at the bottom of it. Hanriot and Saint Just, bruised, begrimed, and foul, completed the band. One who walks from the Palace of Justice, over the bridge, along the Rue Saint Honoré, into the Rue Royale, and so to the Luxor column, retraces the *via dolorosa* of the Revolution on the afternoon of the Tenth of Thermidor.

The end of the intricate manœuvres known as the Revolution of Thermidor was the recovery of authority by the Convention. The insurrections, known as the days of the Twelfth Germinal, First Prairial, and Thirteenth Vendémiaire, all ended in the victory of the Convention over the revolutionary forces of Paris. The Committees, on the other hand, had beaten Robespierre, but they had ruined themselves. Very gradually the movement towards order, which had begun in the mind of Danton, and had gone on in the cloudy purposes of Robespierre, became definite. But it was in the interest of very different ideas from those of either Danton or of Robespierre. A White Terror succeeded the Red Terror. Not at once, however; it was not until nine months after the death of Robespierre, that the reaction was strong enough to smite his colleagues of the two Committees. The surviving Girondins had come back to their seats in the Convention:

the Dantonians had not forgiven the execution of their chief. These two parties were bent on vengeance. In April, 1795, a decree was passed banishing Billaud de Varennes, Collot d'Herbois, and Barère. In the following month the leaders of the Committee of General Security were thrown into prison. The revolution had passed into new currents. We cannot see any reasons for thinking that those currents would have led to any happier results if Robespierre had won the battle. Tallien, Fouché, Barras, and the rest may have been thoroughly bad men. But then what qualities had Robespierre for building up a state? He had neither strength of practical character, nor firm breadth of political judgment, nor a sound social doctrine. When we compare him,—I do not say with Frederick of Prussia, with Jefferson, with Washington,—but with the group of able men who made the closing year of the Convention honourable and of good service to France, we have a measure of Robespierre's profound and pitiable incompetence.

TURGOT.

TURGOT.

I.

ANNE-ROBERT-JACQUES TURGOT was born in Paris on the 10th of May, 1727. He died in 1781. His life covered rather more than half a century, extending, if we may put it a little roughly, over the middle fifty years of the eighteenth century. This middle period marks the exact date of the decisive and immediate preparation for the Revolution. At its beginning neither the intellectual nor the social elements of the great disruption had distinctly appeared, or commenced their fermentation. At its close their work was completed, and we may count the months thence until the overthrow of every institution in France. It was between 1727 and 1781 that the true revolution took place. The events from '89 were only finishing strokes, the final explosion of a fabric under which every yard had been mined, by the long endeavour for half a century of an army of destroyers deliberate and involuntary, direct and oblique, such as the world has never at any other time beheld.

In 1727 Voltaire was returning from his exile in England, to open the long campaign, of which he was from that time forth to the close of his days the brilliant and indomitable captain. He died in 1778, bright, resolute, humane, energetic, to the last. Thus Turgot's life was almost exactly contemporary with the pregnant era of Voltaire's activity. In the same spring in which Turgot died, Maurepas too came to his

end, and Necker was dismissed. The last event was the signal at which the floods of the deluge fairly began to rise, and the revolutionary tide to swell.

It will be observed, moreover, that Turgot was born half a generation after the first race of the speculative revolutionists. Rousseau, Diderot, Helvétius, Condillac, D'Alembert, as well as the foreign Hume, so much the greatest of the whole band of innovators, because penetrating so much nearer to the depths, all came into the world which they were to confuse so unspeakably, in the half dozen years between 1711 and 1717. Turgot was of later stock, and comes midway between these fathers of the new church, between Hume, Rousseau, Diderot, and the generation of its fiery practical apostles, Condorcet, Mirabeau, Robespierre.[1] The only other illustrious European of this decade was Adam Smith, who was born in 1723, and between whose labours and some of the most remarkable of Turgot's there was so much community. We cannot tell how far the gulf between Turgot and the earlier band was fixed by the accident that he did not belong to their generation in point of time. The accident is in itself only worth calling attention to, in connection with his distance from them in other and more important points than time.

The years of Turgot exactly bridge the interval between the ministry of the infamous Dubois and the ministry of the inglorious Calonne; between the despair and confusion of the close of the regency, and the despair and confusion of the last ten years of the monarchy. In 1727 we stand on the threshold of that far-resounding fiery workshop, where a hundred hands wrought the cunning implements and Cyclopean engines that were to serve in storming the hated citadels of superstition and injustice. In 1781 we emerge from these subterranean realms

[1] Born in 1743, 1749, and 1759 respectively.

into the open air, to find ourselves surrounded by all the sounds and portents of imminent ruin. This, then, is the significance of the date of Turgot's birth.

His stock was Norman, and those who amuse themselves by finding a vital condition of the highest ability in antiquity of blood, may quote the descent of Turgot in support of their delusion. His biographers speak of one Togut, a Danish Prince, who walked the earth some thousand years before the Christian era; and of Saint Turgot in the eleventh century, the Prior of Durham, biographer of Bede, and first minister of Malcolm III. of Scotland. We shall do well not to linger in this too dark and frigid air. Let us pass over Togut and Saint Turgot; and the founder of a hospital in the thirteenth century; and the great-great-grandfather who sat as president of the Norman nobles in the States General of 1614, and the grandfather who deserted arms for the toga. History is hardly concerned in this solemn marshalling of shades.

Even with Michel-Etienne, the father of Turgot, we have here no dealing. Let it suffice to say that he held high municipal office in Paris, and performed its duties with exceptional honour and spirit, giving sumptuous fêtes, constructing useful public works, and on one occasion jeoparding his life with a fine intrepidity that did not fail in his son, in appeasing a bloody struggle between two bodies of Swiss and French guards. There is in the library of the British Museum a folio of 1740, containing elaborate plates and letter-press, descriptive of the fêtes celebrated by the city of Paris with Michel-Etienne Turgot as its chief officer, on the occasion of the marriage of Louise-Elizabeth of France to Don Philip of Spain (August, 1739). As one contemplates these courtly sumptuosities, La Bruyère's famous picture recurs to the mind, of far other scenes

in the same gay land. 'We see certain wild animals, male and female, scattered over the fields, black, livid, all burnt by the sun, bound to the earth that they dig and work with unconquerable pertinacity; they have a sort of articulate voice, and when they rise on their feet, they show a human face; in fact they are men.' That these violent and humiliating contrasts are eternal and inevitable, is the last word of the dominant philosophy of society; and one of the reasons why Turgot's life is worth studying, is that he felt in so pre-eminent a degree the urgency of lightening the destiny of that livid, wild, hardly articulate, ever-toiling multitude.

The sum of the genealogical page is that Turgot inherited that position which, falling to worthy souls, is of its nature so invaluable, a family tradition of exalted courage and generous public spirit. There have been noble and patriotic men who lacked this inheritance, but we may be sure that even these would have fought the battle at greater advantage, if a magnanimous preference for the larger interests had come to them as a matter of instinctive prejudice, instead of being acquired as a matter of reason. The question of titular aristocracy is not touched by this consideration, for titular aristocracies postpone the larger interests to the narrow interests of their order. And Turgot's family was only of the secondary noblesse of the robe.

Turgot was the third son of his father. As the employments which persons of respectable family could enter were definite and stereotyped, there was little room for debate as to the calling for which a youth should prepare himself. Arms, civil administration, and the church, furnished the only three openings for a gentleman. The effects of this rigorous adherence to artificial and exclusive rules of caste were manifestly injurious to society, as such caste rules always are after a society

has passed beyond a certain stage. To identify the interests of the richest and most powerful class with the interests of the church, of the army, and of a given system of civil government, was indeed to give to that class the strongest motives for leaving the existing social order undisturbed. It unfortunately went too far in this direction, by fostering the strongest possible motives of hostility to such modifications in these gigantic departments as changing circumstances might make needful, in the breasts of the only men who could produce these modifications without a violent organic revolution. Such a system left too little course to spontaneity, and its curse is the curse of French genius. Some of its evil effects were obvious and on the surface. The man who should have been a soldier, found himself saying mass and hearing confessions. Vauvenargues, who was born for diplomacy or literature, passed the flower of his days in the organized dreariness of garrisons and marches. In our own day communities and men who lead them have still to learn that no waste is so profuse and immeasurable, even from the material point of view, as that of intellectual energy, checked, uncultivated, ignored, or left without its opportunity. In France, until a very short time before the Revolution, we can hardly point to a single recognised usage which did not augment this waste. The eldest son usually preserved the rank and status of the family, whether civil or military. Turgot's eldest brother was to devote himself to civil administration, the next to be a soldier, and Turgot himself to be an ecclesiastic.

The second of the brothers, who began by following arms, had as little taste for them as the future minister had for the church. It is rather remarkable that he seems to have had the same passion for administration, and he persuaded the government after the loss of Canada that Guiana, to be called

Equinoctial France, would if well governed become some sort of equivalent for the northern possession. He was made Governor-general, but he had forgotten to take the climate into account, and the scheme came to an abortive end, involving him in a mass of confused quarrels which lasted some years. He had a marked love for botany, agriculture, and the like; was one of the founders of the Society of Agriculture in 1760; and was the author of various pieces on points of natural history.[1]

Turgot went as a boarder first to the college of Louis-le-Grand, then to that of Plessis; thence to the seminary of Saint Sulpice, where he took the degree of bachelor in theology; and from Saint Sulpice to the Sorbonne. His childhood and youth, like that of other men who have afterwards won love and admiration, have their stories. The affection of one biographer records how the pocket-money with which the young Turgot was furnished, used always instantly to disappear, no one knew how nor on what. It was discovered that he gave it to poor schoolfellows to enable them to buy books. Condorcet justly remarks on this trait, that 'goodness and even generosity are not rare sentiments in childhood; but for these sentiments to be guided by such wisdom, this really seems the presage of an extraordinary man, all whose sentiments should be virtues, because they would always be controlled by reason.'[2] It is at any rate certain that the union of profound benevolence with judgment, which this story prefigures, was the supreme distinction of Turgot's character. It is less pleasant to learn that Turgot throughout his childhood was always repulsed by his mother, who deemed him sullen, because he failed to make his

[1] Among others, of a little volume still to be met with in libraries, *Sur la manière de préparer les diverses curiosités d'histoire naturelle* (1758).

[2] *Vie de Turgot*, p. 8 (edit. 1847).

bow with good grace, and was shy and taciturn. He fled from her visitors, and would hide himself behind sofa or screen, until dragged forth for social inspection.[1] This is only worth recording, because the same external awkwardness and lack of grace remained with Turgot to the end, and had something to do with the unpopularity that caused his fall. Perhaps he was thinking of his own childhood, when he wrote that fathers are often indifferent, or incessantly occupied with the details of business, and that he had seen the very parents who taught their children that there is nothing so noble as to make people happy, yet repulse the same children when urging some one's claim to charity or favour, and intimidate their young sensibility, instead of encouraging and training it.[2]

Morellet, one of the best known of the little group of friends and brother students at the Sorbonne, has recorded other authentic traits. Turgot, he says, united the simplicity of a child, to a peculiar dignity that forced the respect of his comrades. His modesty and reserve were those of a girl, and those equivocal references in which the undisciplined animalism of youth often has a stealthy satisfaction, always called the blood to his cheeks and covered him with embarrassment. For all that, his spirit was full of a frank gaiety, and he would indulge in long bursts of laughter at a pleasantry or frolic that struck him. We may be glad to know this, because without express testimony to the contrary, there would have been some reason for suspecting that Turgot was defective in that most wholesome and human quality of a capacity for laughter.

The sensitive purity which Morellet notices, not without slight lifting of the eyebrow, remained with Turgot throughout

[1] *Mémoires de Morellet*, i. 12 (ed. 1822).

[2] Lettre à Madame de Graffigny. *Œuvres*, ii. 793.

his life. This was the more remarkable from the prevailing laxity of opinion upon this particular subject, perhaps the worst blemish upon the feeling and intelligence of the revolutionary schools. For it was not merely libertines, like Marmontel, making a plea for their own dissoluteness, who habitually spoke of these things with inconsiderate levity. Grave men of blameless life, like Condorcet, deliberately argued in favour of leaving a loose rein to the mutual inclinations of men and women, and laughed at the time 'wasted in quenching the darts of the flesh.'[1] It is true that at D'Holbach's house, the head-quarters of the dogmatic atheism in which the irreligious reaction culminated, this was the only theme on which freedom of speech was sometimes curtailed. But the fact that such a restriction should have been noticed, suggests that it was exceptional.[2] One good effect followed, let us admit. The virtuousness of continence was not treated as a superstition by those who vindicated it as Turgot did, but discussed like any other virtue; and was defended not as an intuition of faith, but as a reasoned conclusion of the judgment. It was permitted to occupy no solitary and mysterious throne, apart and away from other conditions and parts of human excellence and social well-being. There is intrinsically no harm in any virtue being accepted in the firm shape of a simple prejudice. On the contrary, there is a multitude of practical advantages in such a consolidated and spontaneously working order. But in considering conduct and character, and forming an opinion upon infractions of a virtue, we cannot be just unless we have analysed its conditions, and this is what the eighteenth century

[1] Letter to Turgot, *Œuvres de Condorcet*, i. 228. See also vi. 264, and 523—526.

[2] Morellet, i. 133.

did defectively with regard to that particular virtue which so often usurps the name of all of the virtues together. In this respect Turgot's original purity of character withdrew him from the error of the time.

With the moral quality that we have seen, Morellet adds that for the intellectual side Turgot as a boy had a prodigious memory. He could retain as many as a hundred and eighty lines of verse, after hearing them twice, or sometimes even once. He knew by heart most of Voltaire's fugitive pieces, and long passages in his poems and tragedies. His predominant characteristics are described as penetration, and that other valuable faculty to which penetration is an indispensable adjunct, but which it by no means invariably implies—a spirit of broad and systematic co-ordination. The unusual precocity of his intelligence was perhaps imperfectly appreciated by his fellow-students, it led him so far beyond any point within their sight. It has been justly said of him that he passed at once from infancy to manhood, and was in the rank of sages before he had shaken off the dust of the playground. He was of the type of those who strangle serpents while yet in the cradle. We know the temperament which from the earliest hour consumes with eager desire for knowledge, and energizes spontaneously with unceasing and joyful activity in that bright and pure morning of intellectual curiosity, which neither the dull tumultuous needs of life nor the mists of spiritual misgiving have yet come up to make dim. Of this temperament was Turgot in a superlative degree, and its fire never abated in him from college days, down to the last hours while he lay racked with irremediable anguish.

To a certain extent this was the glorious mark of all the best minds of the epoch; from Voltaire downwards, they were inflamed by an inextinguishable and universal curiosity.

Voltaire hardly left a single corner of the field entirely unexplored in science, poetry, history, philosophy. Rousseau wrote a comic opera and was an ardent botanist. Diderot wrote, and wrote well and intelligently, *de omni scibili*, and was the author alike of the Letters on the Blind and Jacques le Fataliste. No era was ever so little the era of the specialist.

The society of the Sorbonne corresponded exactly to a college at one of our universities, and will be distinguished by the careful reader from the faculty of theology in the university, which was usually, but not always, composed of *docteurs de Sorbonne*. It consisted of a large number of learned men in the position of fellows, and a smaller number of younger students, who lived together just as undergraduates do, in separate apartments, but with common hall, library and garden. One of Turgot's masters, Sigorgne, was the first to teach in the university the Newtonian principles of astronomy, instead of the Cartesian hypothesis of vortices. As is well known, Cartesianism had for various reasons taken a far deeper root in France than it ever did here, and held its place a good generation after Newtonian ideas were accepted and taught at Oxford and Cambridge.[1] Voltaire's translation of the *Principia*, which he was prevented by the Cartesian chancellor, D'Aguesseau, from publishing until 1738, overthrew the reigning system, and gave a strong impulse to scientific inquiry.

Turgot mastered the new doctrine with avidity. In the acute letter of criticism which, while still at the Sorbonne, he addressed to Buffon, he pointedly urged it as the first objection to that writer's theory of the formation and movements of the planets, that any attempt at fundamental explanations of this kind was a departure from 'the simplicity

[1] Whewell's *Hist. Induct. Sciences*, ii. 147—159.

and safe reserve of the philosophy of Newton.'[1] He only, however, made a certain advance in mathematics. He appears to have had no peculiar or natural aptitude for this study; though he is said to have constantly blamed himself for not having gone more deeply into it. It is hardly to be denied that mathematical genius and philosophic genius do not always go together. The precision, definiteness, and accurate limitations of the method of the one, are usually unfriendly to the brooding, tentative, uncircumscribed meditation, which is the productive humour in the other. Turgot was essentially of the philosophizing temper. Though the activity of his intelligence was incessant, his manner of work was the reverse of quick. 'When he applied to work,' says Morellet, 'when it was a question of writing or doing, he was slow and loitering. Slow, because he insisted on finishing all he did perfectly, according to his own conception of perfection, which was most difficult of attainment, even down to the minutest detail; and because he would not receive assistance, being never contented with what he had not done himself. He also loitered a great deal, losing time in arranging his desk and cutting his pens, not that he was not thinking profoundly through all this trifling; but mere thinking did not advance his work.'[2] We may admit, perhaps, that the work was all the better for the thinking that preceded it, and that the time which Turgot seemed to waste in cutting his pens and setting his table in order was more fruitfully spent than the busiest hours of most men.

We know the books which Turgot and his friends devoured with ardour. Locke, Bayle, Voltaire, Buffon, relieved Clarke,

[1] *Œuvres de Turgot*, ii. 783. (Edition of Messrs. Eugène Daire and H. Dussard, published in the *Collection des Principaux Economistes*, published by Guillaumin, 1844). [2] *Mémoires*, i. 16.

Leibnitz, Spinosa, Cudworth; and constant discussions among themselves both cleared up and enlarged what they read.[1] One of the disputants, certainly not the least amiable, has painted his own part in these discussions: 'I was violent in discussion,' says the good Morellet, as he was pleasantly called, 'but without my antagonist being able to reproach me with a single insult; and sometimes I used to spit blood, after a debate in which I had not allowed a single personality to escape me.'[2]

Another member of the circle was Loménie de Brienne, who, in long years after, was chief minister of France for a narrow space through the momentous winter of 1787 and the spring of the next year, filling the gap between Calonne and Necker in a desperate and fatal manner. Loménie's ambition dated from his youth; and it was always personal and mean. While Turgot, his friend, was earnestly meditating on the destinies of the race and the conditions of their development, Loménie was dreaming only of the restoration of his ancestral château of Brienne. Though quite without means, he planned this in his visions on a scale of extreme costliness and magnificence. The dreams fell true. Money came to the family, and the château was built exactly as he had projected it, at a cost of two million francs.[3] His career was splendid. He was clever, industrious, and persevering after his fashion, astute, lively, pretentious, a person ever by well-planned hints leading you to suppose his unrevealed profundity to be bottomless; in a word, in all respects an impostor.[4] He espoused that richly dowered bride the Church, rose to be Archbishop of Toulouse,

[1] *Mémoires*, i. 20.

[2] Ibid. i. 19.

[3] Morellet's *Mémoires*, i. 17—21; 262—270; and ii. 15.

[4] Marmontel's *Mémoires*, bk. xiii.; Morellet, however, with persevering friendliness, denies the truth of Marmontel's picture (ii. 465).

and would have risen to be Archbishop of Paris, but for the King's over-scrupulous conviction that 'an Archbishop of Paris must at least believe in God.' He became an immense favourite with Marie Antoinette and the court, was made Minister 'like Richelieu and Mazarin,' and after having postured and played tricks in face of the bursting deluge, and given the government the final impulse into the abyss of bankruptcy, was dismissed with the rich archbishopric of Sens and a cardinal's hat for himself, and good sinecures for his kinsfolk. His last official act was to send for the 20,000 livres for his month's salary, not fully due. His brother, the Count of Brienne, remained in office as Minister of War. He was a person of no talent, his friends allowed, but 'assisted by a good chief clerk, he would have made a good minister; he meant well.' This was hardly a sufficient reason for letting him take 100,000 francs out of an impoverished treasury for the furniture of his residence. The hour, however, was just striking, and the knife was sharpened.

All his paltry honour and glory Loménie de Brienne enjoyed for a season, until the Jacobins laid violent hands upon him. He poisoned himself in his own palace, just as a worse thing was about to befall him. Alas, poetic justice is the exception in history, and only once in many generations does the drama of the state criminal rise to an artistic fifth act. This was in 1794. In 1750 a farewell dinner had been given in the rooms of the Abbé de Brienne at the Sorbonne, and the friends made an appointment for a game of tennis behind the church of the Sorbonne in the year 1800.[1] The year came, but no Loménie, nor Turgot, and the Sorbonne itself had vanished.

[1] Morellet, i. 21.

When the time arrived for his final acceptance of an ecclesiastical destination, Turgot felt that honourable repugnance, which might have been anticipated alike from his morality and his intelligence, to enter into an engagement which would irrevocably bind him for the rest of his life, either always to hold exactly the same opinions, or else to continue to preach them publicly after he had ceased to hold them privately. No certainty of worldly comfort and advantage could in his eyes counterbalance the possible danger and shame of a position, which might place him between the two alternatives of stifling his intelligence and outraging his conscience—the one by blind, unscrutinising, and immovable acceptance of all the dogmas and sentiments of the Church; the other by the inculcation as truths of what he believed to be false, and the proscription as falsehoods of what he believed to be true. The horror and disgrace of such a situation were too striking for one who used his mind and acted on principle, to run any risk of that situation becoming his own. An ambitious timeserver like Loménie, or a contented adherent of use and wont like Morellet, might well regard such considerations as the products of a weak and eccentric scrupulosity. Turgot was of other calibre, holding it to be only a degree less unprincipled than the avowed selfishness of the adventurer, to contract so serious an engagement on the strength of common hearsay and current usage, without deliberate personal reflection and inquiry.

At the close of his course at the Sorbonne, he wrote a letter to his father giving the reasons for this resolution to abandon all idea of an ecclesiastical career and the advancement which it offered him, and seeking his consent for the change from Church to law. His father approved of the resolution, and gave the required consent. As Turgot had

studied law as well as theology, no time was lost, and he formally entered the profession of the law as Deputy-Counsellor of the Procureur-Général at the beginning of 1752.

His college friends had remonstrated warmly at this surrender of a brilliant prospect. A little deputation of young abbés, fresh from their vows, waited on him at his rooms; in that humour of blithe and sagacious good-will which comes so naturally to men who believe they have just found out Fortune's trick and yoked her fast for ever to the car, they declared that he was about to do something opposed to his own interest and inconsistent with his usual good sense. He was a younger son of a Norman house, and therefore poor; the law without a competency involved no consideration, and he could hope for no advancement in it: whereas in the Church his family, being possessed of influence and credit, would have no difficulty in procuring for him excellent abbeys and in good time a rich bishopric; here he could realise all his fine dreams of administration, and without ceasing to be a churchman could play the statesman to his heart's content. In one profession he would waste his genius in arguing trifling private affairs, while in the other he would be of the highest usefulness to his country, and would acquire the greatest reputation. Turgot, however, insisted on placing genius and reputation below the necessity of being honest. The object of an oath might be of the least important kind, but he could neither allow himself to play with it, nor believe that a man could abase his profession in public opinion, without at the same time abasing himself. '*You shall do as you will,*' he said; '*for my own part, it is impossible for me to wear a mask all my life.*'[1]

His clear intelligence revolted from the dominant sophisms of that time, by which philosophers as well as ecclesiastics

[1] Dupont de Nemours. Condorcet's *Vie de Turgot*, pp. 8—10.

brought falsehood and hypocrisy within the four corners of a decent doctrine of truth and morality. The churchman manfully argued that he could be most useful to the world if he were well off and highly placed. The philosopher contended that as the world would punish him if he avowed what he had written or what he believed, he was fully warranted in lying to the world as to his writing and belief; for is not the right to have the truth told to you, a thing forfeitable by tyranny and oppression?[1] Truth is not mocked, and these sophisms bore their fruit in due season. Perhaps if there had been found on either side in France a hundred righteous men like Turgot, who would not fight in masks, the end might have been other than it was. The lesson remains for those who dream that by reducing pretence to a nicely graduated system, and by leaving an exactly measured margin between what they really believe and what they feign to believe, they are serving the great cause of order. French history informs us what becomes of social order so served. After all, no man can be sure that it is required of him to save society; every man can be sure that he is called upon to keep himself clean from mendacity and equivoke. Such was Turgot's view.

We have said that Turgot disdained to fight under a mask. There was one exception, and only one. In 1754 there appeared two letters, nominally from an ecclesiastic to a

[1] 'La nécessité de mentir pour désavouer un ouvrage est une extrémité qui répugne également à la conscience et à la noblesse du caractère; mais le crime est pour les hommes injustes qui rendent ce désaveu nécessaire à la sûreté de celui qu'ils y forcent. Si vous avez érigé en crime ce qui n'en est pas un, si vous avez porté atteinte, par des lois absurdes ou par des lois arbitraires, au droit naturel qu'ont tous les hommes, non seulement d'avoir une opinion, mais de la rendre publique, alors vous méritez de perdre celui qu'a chaque homme d'entendre la vérité de la bouche d'un autre, droit qui fonde seule l'obligation rigoureuse de ne pas mentir.'—Condorcet, *Vie de Voltaire* (*Œuvres*, iv. 33, 34).

magistrate, and entitled *Le Conciliateur*. Here it is enough to say that they were intended to enforce the propriety and duty of religious toleration. In a letter to a friend we find Turgot saying, 'Although the *Conciliator* is of my principles, and those of our friend, I am astonished at your conjectures; *it is neither his style nor mine.*'[1] Yet Turgot had written it. This is his one public literary equivocation. Let us, at all events, allow that it was resorted to, not to break the law with safety, nor to cloak a malicious attack on a person, but to give additional weight by means of a harmless prosopopœia, to an argument for the noblest of principles.[2]

Before Turgot entered the great world, he had already achieved an amount of success in philosophic speculation, which placed him in the front rank of social thinkers. To that passion for study and the acquisition of knowledge which is not uncommon in youth, as it is one of the most attractive of youth's qualities, there was added in him what is unhappily not common in men and women of any age—an active impulse to use his own intelligence upon the information which he gained from books and professors. He was no conceited or froward caviller at authority, nor born rebel against established teachers and governors. His understanding seriously craved a full and independent satisfaction, and could draw this only from laborious meditation, which should either disclose the inadequacy of the grounds for an opinion, or else establish it, with what would be to him a new and higher, because an independently acquired, conclusiveness.

His letter to Buffon, to which we have already referred, is

[1] *Œuvres*, ii. 685. Morellet says that it was written by Loménie de Brienne, 19.

[2] See the note of Dupont de Nemours, *ad loc.*

an illustration of this wise, and never captious nor ungracious, caution in receiving ideas. Neither Buffon's reputation, nor the glow of his style, nor the dazzling ingenuity and grandeur of his conceptions—all of them so well calculated, at one-and-twenty, to throw even a vigilant intelligence off its guard—could divert Turgot from the prime scientific duty of confronting a theory with facts. Buffon was for explaining the formation of the earth and the other planets, and their lateral movement, by the hypothesis that a comet had fallen obliquely on to the sun, driven off certain portions of its constituent matter in a state of fusion, and that these masses, made spherical by the mutual attraction of their parts, were carried to different distances in proportion to their mass and the force originally impressed on them. Buffon may have been actuated, both here and in his other famous hypothesis of reproduction, by a desire, less to propound a true and durable explanation, than to arrest by a bold and comprehensive generalisation that attention, which is only imperfectly touched by mere collections of particular facts. The enormous impulse which even the most unscientific of the speculations of Descartes had given to European thought, was a standing temptation to philosophers, not to discard nor relax patient observation, but to bind together the results which they arrived at by this process, by means of some hardy hypothesis. It might be true or not, but it was at any rate sure to strike the imagination, which ever craves wholes; and to stimulate discussion and further discovery, by sending assailants and defenders alike in search of new facts, to confirm or overthrow the position.[1]

Turgot was less sensible of these possible advantages, than he was alive to the certain dangers of such a method. He

[1] See Condorcet's éloge on Buffon (*Œuvres*, iii. 335); and a passage from Bourdon, quoted in Whewell's *Hist. Induct. Sci.*, iii. 348.

perceived that to hold a theory otherwise than as an inference from facts, is to have a strong motive for looking at the facts in a predetermined light, or for ignoring them; an involuntary predisposition most fatal to the discovery of truth, which is nothing more than the conformity of our conception of facts to their adequately observed order. Why, he asks, do you replunge us into the night of hypotheses, justifying the Cartesians and their three elements and their vortices? And whence comes your comet? Was it within the sphere of the sun's attraction? If not, how could it fall from the sphere of the other bodies, and fall on the sun, which was not acting on it? If it was, it must have fallen perpendicularly, not obliquely; and, therefore, if it imparted a lateral movement, this direction must have been impressed on it. And, if so, why should not God have impressed this movement upon the planets directly, as easily as upon the comet to communicate it to them? Finally, how could the planets have left the body of the sun without falling back into it again? What curve did they describe in leaving it, so as never to return? Can you suppose that gravitation could cause the same body to describe a spiral and an ellipse? In the same exact spirit, Turgot brings known facts to bear on Buffon's theory of the arrangement of the terrestrial and marine divisions of the earth's surface. The whole criticism he sent to Buffon anonymously, to assure him that the writer had no other motive than the interest he took in the discovery of truth and the perfection of a great work.[1]

Turgot's is probably the only case where the biographer has, in emerging from the days of school and college, at once to proceed to expound and criticise the intellectual productions of his hero, and straightway to present fruit and flower of a

[1] October, 1748. *Œuvres*, ii. 782—4.

time that usually does no more than prepare the unseen roots. There is, perhaps, a wider and more stimulating attraction of a dramatic kind in the study of characters which present a history of active and continuous growth; which, while absolutely free from flimsy caprice and disordered eccentricity, are ever surprising our attention by an unsuspected word of calm judgment or fertile energy, a fresh interest or an added sympathy, by the disappearance of some crudity or the assimilation of some new and richer quality. Of such gradual rise into full maturity we have here nothing to record. As a student Turgot had already formed the list of a number of works which he designed to execute; poems, tragedies, philosophic romances, vast treatises on physics, history, geography, politics, morals, metaphysics, and language.[1] Of some he had drawn out the plan, and even these plans and fragments possess a novelty and depth of view that belong even to the integrity of few works.

Before passing on to the more scientific speculations of this remarkable intelligence, it is worth while to notice his letter to Madame de Graffigny, both for the intrinsic merit and scope of the ideas it contains, and for the proof it furnishes of the interest, at once early and profound, which he took in moral questions lying at the very bottom, as well of sound character, as of a healthy society. Turgot's early passion for literature had made him seize an occasion of being introduced to even so moderately renowned a professor of it as Madame de Graffigny. He happened to be intimate with her niece, who afterwards became the lively and witty wife of Helvétius, somewhat to the surprise of Turgot's friends. For although he persuaded Mademoiselle de Ligni-

[1] Condorcet's *Vie de Turgot*, 14.

ville to present him to her aunt, and though he assiduously attended Madame de Graffigny's literary gatherings, Turgot would constantly quit the circle of men of letters, for the sake of a game of battledore with the comely and attractive niece. Hence the astonishment of men that from such familiarity there grew no stronger passion, and that whatever the causes of such reserve, the only issue was a tender and lasting friendship.[1]

Madame de Graffigny had begged Turgot's opinion upon the manuscript of a work composed, as so many others were, after the pattern of Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*,—now nearly thirty years old,—and bearing the accurately imitative title of *Lettres Peruviennes*. A Peruvian comes to Europe, and sends to a friend or mistress in Peru a series of remarks on civilisation. Goldsmith's delightful *Citizen of the World* is the best known type in our own literature of this primitive form of social criticism. The effect upon common opinion of criticism cast in such a mould, presenting familiar habits, institutions, and observances, in a striking and unusual light, was to give a kind of Socratic stimulus to people's ideas about education, civilisation, conduct, and the other topics springing from a comparison between the manners of one community and another. That one of the two, whether Peru, or China, or Persia, was a community drawn mainly from the imagination, did not render the contrast any the less effective in stirring men's minds.

By the middle of the century the air was full of ideas upon these social subjects. The temptation was irresistible to turn from the confusion of squalor, oppression, license, distorted organization, penetrative disorder, to ideal states comprising a little range of simple circumstances, and a small

[1] Morellet, i. 140.

number of types of virtuous and unsophisticated character. Much came of the relief thus sought and found. It was the beginning of the subversive process, for it taught men to look away from ideas of practical amelioration. The genius of Rousseau gave these dreams the shape which, in many respects so unfortunately for France, finally attracted the bulk of the national sentiment and sympathy. But the vivid, humane, and inspiring pages of *Emile* were not published until ten years after Turgot's letter to Madame de Graffigny:[1] a circumstance which may teach us that in moral as in physical discoveries, though one man may take the final step and reap the fame, the conditions have been prepared beforehand. It is almost discouraging to think that we may reproduce such passages as the following, without being open to the charge of slaying the slain, though one hundred and twenty years have elapsed since it was written.

'Let Zilia show that our too arbitrary institutions have too often made us forget nature; that we have been the dupes of our own handiwork, and that the savage who does not know how to consult nature, knows how to follow her. Let her criticise our pedantry, for it is this that constitutes our education of the present day. Look at the Rudiments; they begin by insisting on stuffing into the heads of children a crowd of the most abstract ideas. Those whom nature in her variety summons to her by all her objects, we fasten up in a single spot, we occupy them on words which cannot convey any sense to them, because the sense of words can only come with ideas, and ideas only come by degrees, starting from sensible objects.[2]

[1] Written in 1751. *Œuvres*, ii. 785—794.

[2] 'On sera surpris que je compte l'étude des langues au nombre des inutilités de l'éducation,' &c.—*Emile*, bk. ii.

But, besides, we insist on their acquiring them without the help that we have had, we whom age and experience have formed. We keep their imagination prisoner, we deprive them of the sight of objects by which nature gives to the savage his first notions of all things, of all the sciences even. We have not the coup-d'œil of nature.

'It is the same with morality; general ideas again spoil all. People take great trouble to tell a child that he must be just, temperate, and virtuous; and has it the least idea of virtue? Do not say to your son, *Be virtuous*, but make him find pleasure in being so; develope within his heart the germ of sentiments that nature has placed there.[1] There is often much more need for bulwarks against education, than against nature. Give him opportunities of being truthful, liberal, compassionate; rely on the human heart; leave these precious seeds to bloom in the air which surrounds them; do not stifle them under a quantity of frames and network. I am not one of those who want to reject general and abstract ideas; they are necessary; but I by no means think them in their place in our method of instruction. I would have them come to children as they come to men, by degrees.

'Another article of our education, which strikes me as bad and ridiculous, is our severity towards these poor children. They do something silly; we take them up as if it were extremely important. There is a multitude of these follies, of which they will cure themselves by age alone. But people do not count on that; they insist that the son should be well bred, and they overwhelm him with little rules of civility, often frivolous, which can only harass him, as he does not know the reason for them. I think it would be enough to hinder him from being troublesome to the persons that he

[1] See Locke. *Of Education*, §81, §184, &c.

sees.[1] The rest will come, little by little. Inspire him with the desire of pleasing; he will soon know more of the art than all the masters could teach him. People wish again that a child should be grave; they think it wise for it not to run, and fear every moment that it will fall. What happens? You weary and enfeeble it. We have especially forgotten that it is a part of education to form the body.'[2]

The reader who remembers Locke's Thoughts concerning Education (published in 1690), and the particularly homely prescriptions upon the subjects of the infant body with which that treatise opens, will recognize the source of Turgot's inspiration. The same may be said of the other wise passages in this letter, upon the right attitude of a father towards his child. It was not merely the metaphysics of the sage and positive Locke which laid the revolutionary train in France. This influence extended over the whole field, and even Rousseau confesses the obligations of the imaginary governor of Emile to the real Locke.

We are again plainly in the Lockian atmosphere, when Turgot speaks of men being the dupes of 'general ideas, which are true because drawn from nature, but which people embrace with a narrow stiffness that makes them false,

[1] 'La seule leçon de morale qui convienne à l'enfance, et la plus importante à tout âge, est de ne jamais faire de mal à personne,' &c. *Emile*, bk. ii. 'Never trouble yourself about these faults in them, which you know age will cure. And therefore want of well-fashioned civility in the carriage . . . should be the parents' least care while they are young. If his tender mind be filled with a veneration for his parents and teachers, which consists in love and esteem and a fear to offend them; and with respect and good-will to all people; that respect will of itself teach these ways of expressing it, which he observes most acceptable,' &c.—Locke. *Of Education*, §67, §63, &c.

[2] 'Vous donnez la science, à la bonne heure; moi je m'occupe de l'instrument propre à l'acquérir,' &c.—*Emile.*

because they no longer combine them with circumstances, taking for absolute what is only the expression of a relation.' The merit of this and the other educational parts of the piece, is not their originality, but that kind of complete and finished assimilation which is all but tantamount to independent thought, and which in certain conditions may be much more practically useful.

Not less important to the happiness of men than the manner of their education, is their own cultivation of a wise spirit of tolerance in conduct. 'I should like to see explained,' Turgot says, 'the causes of alienation and disgust between people who love one another. I believe that after living awhile with men, we perceive that bickerings, ill-humours, teazings on trifles, perhaps cause more troubles and divisions among them than serious things. How many bitternesses have their origin in a word, in forgetfulness of some slight observances. If people would only weigh in an exact balance so many little wrongs, if they would only put themselves in the place of those who have to complain of them, if they would only reflect how many times they have themselves given way to humours, how many things they have forgotten! A single word spoken in disparagement of our intelligence is enough to make us irreconcilable, and yet how often have we been deceived in the very same matter. How many persons of understanding have we taken for fools? Why should not others have the same privilege as ourselves? . . . . Ah, what address is needed to live together, to be compliant without cringing, to expose a fault without harshness, to correct without imperious air, to remonstrate without ill temper!' All this is wise and good, but, alas, as Turgot had occasion by-and-by to say, little comes of giving rules instead of breeding habits.

It is curious that Turgot as early in his career as this

should have protested against one of the most dange rous doctrines of the *philosophe* school. 'I have long thought ,' he says, 'that our nation needs to have marriage and marriage preached to it. We contract marriages ign from views of ambition or interest; and as many of them unhappy in consequence, we may see growing up from da day a fashion of thinking that is extremely mischievou the community, to manners, to the stability of families, to domestic happiness and virtue.'[1] Looseness of opi as to the family and the conditions of its well-being stability, was a flaw that ran through the whole perio revolutionary thought. It was not surprising that the fa should come in for its share of destructive criticism, a with the other elements of the established system, but a proof of the solidity of Turgot's understanding that should from the first have detected the mischievousne this side of the great social attack. Nor did subsequen cussion with the champions of domestic license hav effect upon his opinion.

He makes the protest which the moralist makes, an to make in every age, against the practice of determinin expediency of a marriage by considerations of money or There is a great abuse, he says, in the manner in marriages are made without the two persons most con having any knowledge of one another, and solely und authority of the parents, who are guided either by f or else by station, that will one day translate itself into f 'I know,' he says, 'that even marriages of inclination always succeed. So from the fact that sometimes make mistakes in their choice, it is concluded that we never to choose.' Condorcet, we may remember, man

[1] ii. 790.

after, insisted on the banishment by public opinion of avaricious and mercenary considerations from marriage, as one of the most important means of diminishing the great inequalities in the accumulation of wealth.[1]

In the same letter he took sides by anticipation in another cardinal controversy of the epoch, by declaring a preference for the savage over the civilised state to be a 'ridiculous declamation.' This strange and fatal debate had been opened by Rousseau's memorable first Discourse, which was given to the world in 1750. Preference for the savage state was Turgot's peculiar form assumed by emotional protests against the whole existing system of the distribution of wealth. Turgot from first to last resisted the whole spirit of such protests. In this letter, where he makes his first approach to the subject, he insists on inequality of conditions, as alike necessary and useful. It is necessary 'because men are not born equal; because their strength, their intelligence, their passions, would be perpetually overthrowing that momentous equilibrium among them, which the laws might have established.

'What would society be without this inequality of conditions? Each individual would be reduced to mere necessaries, or rather there would be very many to whom mere necessaries would be by no means assured. Men cannot labour without implements and without the means of subsistence, until the gathering in of the produce. Those who have not had intelligence enough, or any opportunity to acquire these things, have no right to take them away from one who has earned and deserved them by his labour. If the idle and ignorant were to despoil the industrious and the skilful, all works would be discouraged, and misery would become universal. It is alike more just and more useful that all those who have fallen behind either in

[1] *Œuvres de Condorcet*, vi. 245.

wit or in good fortune, should lend their right arms to those who know how best to employ them, who can pay them a wage in advance, and guarantee them a share in the future profits. . . . There is no injustice in this, that a man who has discovered a productive kind of work, and who has supplied his assistants with sustenance and the necessary implements, who for this has only made free contracts with them, should keep back the larger part, and that as payment for his advances he should have less toil and more leisure. It is this leisure which gives him a better chance of revolving schemes, and still further increasing his lights; and what he can economise from his share of the produce, which is with entire equity a larger share, augments his capital, and adds to his power of entering into new undertakings. . . . .

'What would become of society, if things were not so, and if each person tilled his own little plot? He would also have to build his own house, and make his own clothes. What would the people live upon, who dwell in lands that produce no wheat? Who would transport the productions of one country to another country? The humblest peasant enjoys a multitude of commodities often got together from remote climes. . . This distribution of professions necessarily leads to inequality of conditions.'

So early was the rational answer ready for those socialistic sophisms which for so many years misled the most generous part of French intelligence. We may regret perhaps that in demolishing the vision of perfect social inequality, Turgot did not show a more lively sense of the need for lessening and softening unavoidable inequalities of condition. However capable these inequalities may be of scientific defence, they are none the less on that account in need of incessant and strenuous practical modification; and it is one of the most

serious misfortunes of society, and is unhappily long likely to remain so, that since the absorbing question of the reformation of the economic conditions of the social union has come more and more prominently to the front, gradually but irresistibly thrusting behind both its religious and its political conditions, zeal for the amelioration of the common lot has in so few auspicious instances been according to knowledge; while the professors of science have been more careful to compose narrow apologies for individual selfishness, than to extend as widely as possible the limits set by demonstrable principle to the improvement of the common life.

We may notice too in this Letter, what so many of Turgot's allies and friends were disposed to complain of, but what will commend him to a less newly emancipated and therefore a less fanatical generation. There is a conspicuous absence of that peculiar boundlessness of hope, that zealous impatience for the instant realisation and fruition of all the inspirations of philosophic intelligence, which carried others immediately around him so excessively far in the creed of Perfectibility. 'Liberty! I answer with a sigh, maybe that men are not worthy of thee! Equality! They would yearn after thee, but cannot attain!' Compared with the confident exultation and illimitable sense of the worth of man which distinguished that time, there is something like depression here, as in many other places in Turgot's writings. It is usually less articulate, and is rather conveyed by a running undertone, which so often reveals more of a writer's true mood and temper than is seen in his words, giving to them, by some unconscious and inscrutable process, living effects upon the reader's sense like those of eye and voice and accompanying gesture.

Dejection, however, is perhaps not the most proper word for the humour of reserved and grave suspense, natural in

those rare spirits who have recognised how narrow is the way of truth and how few there be that enter therein, and what prolonged concurrence of favouring hazards with gigantic endeavour is needed for each smallest step in the halting advancement of the race. With Turgot this was not the result of mere sentimental brooding. It had a deliberate and reasoned foundation in historical study. He was patient and not hastily sanguine as to the speedy coming of the millennial future, exactly because history had taught him to measure the laggard paces of the past. The secret of the intense hopefulness of that time lay in the mournfully erroneous conviction that the one condition of progress is plenteous increase of light. Turgot saw very early that this is not so. '*It is not error*,' he wrote, in a saying that every champion of a new idea should have ever in letters of flame before his eyes, '*which opposes the progress of truth: it is indolence, obstinacy, the spirit of routine, everything that favours inaction.*'[1]

The others left these potent elements of obstruction out of calculation and account. With Turgot they were the main facts to be considered, and the main forces to be counteracted. It is the mark of the highest kind of union between sagacious, firm, and clear-sighted intelligence, and a warm and steadfast glow of social feeling, when a man has learnt how little the effort of the individual can do either to hasten or direct the current of human destiny, and yet finds in effort his purest pleasure and his most constant duty. If we owe honour to that social endeavour which is stimulated and sustained by an enthusiastic confidence in speedy and full fruition, we surely owe it still more to those, who knowing how remote and precarious and long beyond their own days

[1] *Œuvres*, ii. 672.

is the hour of fruit, yet need no other spur nor sustenance than bare hope, and in this strive and endeavour and still endeavour. Here lies the true strength, and it was the possession of this strength and the constant call and strain upon it, which gave Turgot in mien and speech a gravity that revolted the frivolous or indifferent, and seemed cold and timorous to the enthusiastic and urgent. Turgot had discovered that there was a law in the history of men, and he knew how this law limited and conditioned progress.

II.

In 1750 Turgot, then only in his twenty-fourth year, was appointed to the honorary office of Prior of the Sorbonne, an elective distinction conferred annually, as it appears, on some meritorious or highly connected student. It was held in the following year by Loménie de Brienne. In this capacity Turgot read two Latin dissertations, one at the opening of the session, and the other at its close. The first of these was upon 'The Advantages that the Establishment of Christianity has conferred upon the Human Race.'

Its value, as might well have been expected from the circumstances of its production, is not very high. It is pitched in a tone of exaltation that is eminently unfavourable to the permanently profitable treatment of such a subject. There are in it too many of those eloquent and familiar commonplaces of orthodox history, by which the doubter tries to warm himself into belief, and the believer dreams that he is corroborating faith by reason. The assembly for whom his discourse was prepared, could hardly have endured the apparition in the midst of them of what both rigorous justice and accurate history required to have taken into account on the other side.

It was not to be expected that a young student within the precincts of the Sorbonne should have any eyes for the evil with which the forms of the Christian religion, like other growths of the human mind, from the lowest forms of savage animism upwards, have ever alloyed its good. The absence of all reference to one half of what the annals of the various Christian churches have to teach us, robs the first of Turgot's discourses of that serious and durable quality which belongs to all his other writings.

It is fair to point out that the same vicious exclusiveness was practised by the enemies of the Church, and that if history was to one of the two contending factions an exaggerated enumeration of the blessings of Christianity, it was to their passionate rivals only a monotonous catalogue of curses. Of this temper we have a curious illustration in the circumstance that Dupont, Turgot's intimate friend of later years, who collected and published his works, actually took the trouble to suppress the opening of this very Discourse, in which Turgot had replied to the reproach often made against Christianity, of being useful only for a future life.[1]

In the first Discourse, Turgot considers the influence of Christianity first upon human nature, and secondly on political societies. One feature at least deserves remark, and this is that in spite both of a settled partiality, and a certain amount of the common form of theology, yet at bottom and putting some phrases apart, religion is handled, and its workings traced, much as they would have been if treated as admittedly secular forces. And this was somewhat. Let us proceed to analyse what Turgot says.

1. Before the preaching and acceptance of the new faith, all nations alike were plunged into the most extravagant

[1] *Œuvres*, ii. 586 *n*.

superstitions. The most frightful dissoluteness of manners was encouraged by the example of the gods themselves. Every passion and nearly every vice was the object of a monstrous deification. A handful of philosophers existed, who had learnt no better lesson from their reason, than to despise the multitude of their fellows. In the midst of the universal contagion, the Jews alone remained pure. Even the Jews were affected with a narrow and sterile pride, which proved how little they appreciated the priceless treasure that was entrusted to their keeping. What were the effects of the appearance of Christ, and the revelation of the gospel? It inspired men with a tender zeal for the truth, and by establishing the necessity of a body of teachers for the instruction of nations, made studiousness and intellectual application indispensable in a great number of persons.

Consider, again, the obscurity, incertitude, and incongruousness, that marked the ideas of the wisest of the ancients upon the nature of man and of God, and the origin of creation; the Ideas of Plato, for instance, the Numbers of Pythagoras, the theurgic extravagances of Plotinus and Porphyry and Iamblichus; and then measure the contributions made by the scholastic theologians, whose dry method has undergone so much severe condemnation, to the instruments by which knowledge is enlarged and made accurate. It was the Church, moreover, which civilised the Northern barbarians, and so preserved the West from the same barbarism and desolation with which the triumphs of Mahometanism replaced the knowledge and arts and prosperity of the East. It is to the services of the Church that we owe the perpetuation of a knowledge of the ancient tongues, and if this knowledge, and the possession of the masterpieces of thought and feeling and form, the flower of the ancient European mind, remained

so long unproductive, still religious organisation deserves our gratitude equally for keeping these great treasures for happier times. They survived, as trees stripped by winter of their leaves survive through frost and storm, to give new blossoms in a new spring.

This much on the intellectual side; but how can we describe the moral transformation which the new faith brought to pass? Men who had hitherto only regarded gods as beings to be entreated to avert ill or bestow blessing, now learnt the nobler emotion of devout love for a divinity of supreme power and beneficence. The new faith, besides kindling love for God, inflamed the kindred sentiment of love for men, all of whom it declared to be the children of God, one vast family with a common father. Julian himself bore witness to the fidelity with which the Christians, whose faith he hated or despised, tended the sick and fed the poor, not only of their own association, but those also who were without the fold. The horrible practice of exposing new-born infants, which outraged nature, and yet did not touch the heart nor the understanding of a Numa, an Aristotle, a Confucius, was first proscribed by the holy religion of Christ. If shame and misery still sometimes, in the hearts of poor outcast mothers, overpower the horror which Christianity first inspired, it is still the same religion which has opened sheltering places for the unhappy victims of such a practice, and provided means for rearing foundlings into useful citizens.

Christian teaching by reviving the principles of sensibility within the breast, may be said 'to have in some sort unveiled human nature to herself.' If the cruelty of old manners has abated, do we not owe the improvement to such courageous priests as Ambrose, who refused admission into the church to Theodosius, because in punishing a guilty city he had

hearkened to the voice rather of wrath than of justice; or as that Pope who insisted that Lewis the Seventh should expiate by a rigorous penance the sack and burning of Vitry.[1] It is not to a Titus, a Trajanus, an Antoninus, that we owe the abolition of the bloody gladiatorial games; it is to Jesus Christ. Virtuous unbelievers have not seldom been the apostles of benevolence and humanity, but we rarely see them in the asylums of misery. Reason speaks, but it is religion that makes men act. How much dearer to us than the splendid monuments of antique taste, power, and greatness, are those Gothic edifices reared for the poor and the orphan, those far nobler monuments of the piety of Christian princes and the power of Christian faith. The rudeness of their architecture may wound the delicacy of our taste, but they will be ever beloved by feeling hearts. 'Let others admire in the retreat prepared for those who have sacrificed in battle their lives or their health for the State, all the gathered riches of the arts, displaying in the eyes of all the nations the magnificence of Lewis the Fourteenth, and carrying our renown to the level of that of Greece and Rome. What I will admire is such a use of those arts; the sublime glory of serving the weal of men raises them higher than they had ever been at Rome or at Athens.'

2. Let us turn from the action of the Christian faith in modifying the passions of the individual, to its influence upon societies of men. How has Christianity ameliorated the great art of government, with reference to the two characteristic aims of that art, the happiness of communities, and their stability? 'Nature has given all men the right of being happy,' but the old lawgivers abandoned nature's wise economy,

[1] See Martin's *Hist. de la France*, iii. 422. Or Morison's *Life of Saint Bernard*, bk. iii. ch. vi.

by which she uses the desires and interests of individuals to fulfil her general plans and ensure the common weal. Men like Lycurgus destroyed all idea of property, violated the laws of modesty, and annihilated the tenderest ties of blood. A false and mischievous spirit of system seduced them away from the true method, the feeling after experience.[1] A general injustice reigned in the laws of all nations; among all of them what was called the public good was confined to a small number of men. Love of country was less the love of fellow-citizens than a common hatred towards strangers. Hence the barbarities practised by the ancients upon their slaves, hence that custom of slavery once spread over the whole earth, those horrible cruelties in the wars of the Greeks and the Romans, that barbarous inequality between the two sexes which still reigns in the East; hence the tyranny of the great towards the common people in hereditary aristocracies, the profound degradation of subject peoples. In short, everywhere the stronger have made the laws and have crushed the weak; and if they have sometimes consulted the interests of a given society, they have always forgotten those of the human race. To recall right and justice, a principle was necessary that could raise men above themselves and all around them, that could lead them to survey all nations and all conditions with an equitable gaze, and in some sort with the eyes of God himself. This is what religion has done. What other principle could have fought and vanquished both interests and prejudice united?

Nothing but the Christian religion could have worked that general revolution in men's minds, which brought the rights of humanity out into full day, and reconciled an affectionate preference for the community of which one makes a part, with

[1] *Les hommes en tout ne s'éclairent que par le tâtonnement de l'expérience.* P. 593.

a general love for mankind. Even the horrors of war were softened, and humanity began to be spared such frightful sequels of triumph, as towns burnt to ashes, populations put to the sword, the wounded massacred in cold blood, or reserved to give a ghastly decoration to triumph. Slavery, where it was not abolished, was constantly and effectively mitigated by Christian sentiment, and the fact that the Church did not peremptorily insist on its universal abolition was due to a wise reluctance to expose the constitution of society to so sudden and violent a shock. Christianity without formal precepts, merely by inspiring a love of justice and mercy in men's hearts, prevented the laws from becoming an instrument of oppression, and held a balance between the strong and the feeble.

If the history of the ancient republics shows that they hardly knew the difference between liberty and anarchy, and if even the profound Aristotle seemed unable to reconcile monarchy with a mild government, is not the reason to be found in the fact that before the Christian era, the various governments of the world only presented either an ambition without bound or limit, or else a blind passion for independence? a perpetual balance between oppression on the one side, and revolt on the other? In vain did lawgivers attempt to arrest this incessant struggle of conflicting passions by laws which were too weak for the purpose, because they were in too imperfect an accord with opinions and manners. Religion, by placing man under the eyes of an all-seeing God, imposed on human passions the only rein capable of effectually bridling them. It gave men internal laws, that were stronger than all the external bonds of the civil laws. By means of this internal change, it has everywhere had the effect of weakening despotism, so that the limits of Christianity seem to mark also the limits of mild government and public felicity. Kings saw

the supreme tribunal of a God who should judge them and the cause of their people. Thus the distance between them and their subjects became as nothing in the infinite distance between kings and subjects alike, and the divinity that was equally elevated above either. They were both in some sort equalised by a common abasement. 'Ye nations, be subject to authority,' cried the voice of religion to the one; and to the other it cried, 'Ye kings, who judge the earth, learn that God has only entrusted you with the image of power for the happiness of your peoples.'

An eloquent description of the efficacy of Christianity in raising human nature, and impressing on kings the obligation of pursuing above all things the well-being of their subjects, closes with a courtly official salutation of the virtues of that Very Christian King, Lewis the Fifteenth.

'It is ill reasoning against religion,' an illustrious contemporary of Turgot's had said, in a deprecatory sentence that serves to mark the spirit of the time; 'to compile a long list of the evils which it has inflicted, without doing the same for the blessings which it has bestowed.'[1] Conversely we may well think it unphilosophical and unconvincing to enumerate all the blessings without any of the evils; to tell us how the Christian doctrine enlarged the human spirit, without observing what narrowing limitations it imposed; to dwell on all the mitigating influences with which the Christian churches have been associated, while forgetting all the ferocities which they have inspired. The history of European belief offers a double record since the decay of polytheism, and if for a certain number of centuries this record shows the civilisation of men's instincts by Christianity, it reveals to us in the centuries

[1] *Esprit des Lois*, bk. xxiv. ch. ii.

subsequent, the reverse process of the civilisation of Christianity by men's instincts. Turgot's piece treats half the subject as if it were the whole. He extends down to the middle of the eighteenth century a number of propositions and implied inferences, which are only true up to the beginning of the fourteenth.

Even within this limitation there are many questions that no student of Turgot's capacity would now overlook, yet of which he and the most reasonable spirits of his age took no cognisance. The men of neither side in the eighteenth century knew what the history of opinion meant. All alike concerned themselves with its truth or falsehood, with what they counted to be its abstract fitness or unfitness. A perfect method places a man where he can command one point of view as well as the other, and can discern not only how far an idea is true and convenient, but also how, whether true and convenient or otherwise, it came into its place in men's minds. We ought to be able to separate in thought the question of the grounds and evidence for a given dogma being true, from the distinct and purely historic question of the social and intellectual conditions which made men accept it for true.

Where, however, there was any question of the two religions whose document and standards are professedly drawn from the Bible, there the Frenchmen of that time assumed not a historic attitude, but one exclusively dogmatic. Everybody was so anxious to prove, that he had neither freedom nor humour to observe. The controversy as to the exact measure of the supernatural force in Judaism and its Christian development was so overwhelmingly absorbing, as to leave without light or explanation the wide and independent region of their place as simply natural forces. It may be said, and perhaps it is true, that people never allow the latter side of the inquiry to become

prominent in their minds, until they have settled the former, and settled it in one way: they must be indifferent to the details of the natural operations of a religion, until they are convinced that there are none of any other kind. Be this as it may, we have to record the facts. And it is difficult to imagine a Frenchman of the era of the Encyclopædia asking himself the sort of questions which now present themselves to the student in such abundance. For instance, has one effect of Christianity been to exalt a regard for the Sympathetic over the Æsthetic side of action and character? And if so, to what elements in the forms of Christian teaching and practice is this due? And is such a transfer of the highest place from the beauty to the loveableness of conduct, to be accounted a gain, when contrasted with the relative position of the two sides among the Greeks and Romans?

Again, we have to draw a distinction between the Christian idea and the outward Christian organisation, and between the consequences to human nature and society which flowed from the first, and the advantages which may be traced to the second. There was on the one hand a doctrine, stirring dormant spiritual instincts, and satisfying active spiritual needs; on the other an external institution, preserving, interpreting, developing, and applying the doctrine. Each of the two has its own origin, its own history, its own destiny in the memories of the race. We may attempt to estimate the functions of the one, without pronouncing on the exact value of the other. If the idea was the direct gift of heaven, the policy was due to the sagacity and mother-wit of the great ecclesiastical statesmen. If the doctrine was a supernatural boon, at least the forms in which it came gradually to overspread Europe were to be explained on rational and natural grounds. And if historical investigation of these forms and

their influences should prove that they are the recognisable roots of most of the benign growths which are vaguely styled results of Christianity, then such a conclusion would seriously attenuate the merits of the supernatural Christian doctrine in favour of the human Christian policy.

If there had been in the Christian idea the mysterious self-sowing quality so constantly claimed for it, how came it that in the Eastern part of the Empire it was as powerless for spiritual or moral regeneration as it was for political health and vitality, while in the Western part it became the organ of the most important of all the past transformations of the civilised world? Is not the difference to be explained by the difference in the surrounding medium, and what is the effect of such an explanation upon the supernatural claims of the Christian idea? Does such an explanation reduce that idea to the rank of one of the historic forces, which arise and operate and expand themselves in accordance with strictly natural conditions? The Christianity of the East was probably as degraded a form of belief, as lowering for human character, and as mischievous to social wellbeing, as has ever been held by civilised peoples. Yet the East, strangely enough, was the great home and nursery of all that is most distinctive in the constituent ideas of the Christian faith. Why, in meditating on Christianity, are we to shut our eyes to the depravation that overtook it when placed amid unfavourable social conditions, and to confine our gaze to the brighter qualities which it developed in the healthier atmosphere of the West?

Further, Turgot might have asked with much profit to the cause of historic truth, and perhaps in more emancipated years he did ask, whether economic circumstances have not had more to do with the dissolution of slavery than Christian doctrines:—whether the rise of rent from free tenants over the

profits to be drawn from slave-labour by the landowner, has not been a more powerful stimulant to emancipation, than the moral maxim that we ought to love one another, or the Christian proposition that we are all equals before the divine throne and co-heirs of salvation:—whether a steady and permanent fall in the price of slave-raised productions had not as much to do with the decay of slavery in Europe, as the love of God or the doctrine of human brotherhood.[1] That the influence of Christianity, so far as it went, and, so far as it was a real power, tended both to abolish slavery, and, where it was too feeble to press in this direction, at any rate tended to mitigate the harshness of its usages, is hardly to be denied by any fair-minded person. The true issue is what this influence amounted to. The orthodox historian treats it as single and omnipotent. His heterodox brother—in the eighteenth century they both usually belonged to one family—leaves it out.

The crowded annals of human misology, as well as the more terrible chronicle of the consequences when misology has impatiently betaken itself to the cruel arm of flesh, show the decisive importance of the precise way in which a great subject of debate is put. Now the whole question of religion was in those days put with radical incompleteness, and Turgot's dissertation was only in a harmony that might have been expected with the prevailing error. The champions of authority, like the leaders of the revolt, insisted on inquiring absolutely, not relatively; on judging religion with reference to human nature in the abstract, instead of with reference to the changing varieties of social institution and circumstance. We ought to place ourselves where we can see both lines of inquiry to be

[1] See on this subject Finlay's *Mediæval Greece and Trebizond*, p. 197; and also, on the other hand, p. 56.

possible. We ought to place ourselves where we can ask what the tendencies of Christian influence have been, without mixing up with that question the further and distinct inquiry what these tendencies are now, or are likely to be. The nineteenth century has hitherto leaned to the historical and relative aspect of the great controversy. The eighteenth was characteristically dogmatic, and the destroyers of the faith were not any less dogmatic in their own way, than those who professed to be its apologists.

Probably it was not long after the composition of this apologetic thesis, before Turgot became alive to the precise position of a creed which had come to demand apologetic theses. This was, indeed, one of the marked and critical moments in the great transformation of religious feeling and ecclesiastical order in Europe, of which our own age, four generations later, is watching a very decisive, if not a final stage. Turgot's demonstration of the beneficence of Christianity was delivered in July, 1750—almost the exact middle of the eighteenth century. The death of the Emperor Charles the Sixth, ten years before, had given the signal for the break-up of the European system. The iron army of Prussia made its first stride out of the narrow northern borders, into the broad arena of the West, and every new illustration of the fortitude and depth and far-reaching power of Prussia has been a new blow to the old Catholic organisation. The first act of this prodigious drama closed while Turgot was a pupil at the Sorbonne. The court of France had blundered into alliances against the retrograde and Catholic house of Austria, while England, with equal blindness, had stumbled into friendship with it. Before the opening of the second act or true climax —that is, before the Seven Years War began—interests and

forces became more naturally adjusted. France, Spain, and Austria, Bourbons and Hapsburgs, the great pillars of the Church, were ranged against England and Prussia, the half-conscious representatives of those industrial and individualist principles which replaced, whether for a time or permanently, the decaying system of aristocratic caste in temporal things, and an ungrowing Catholicism in things spiritual. In 1750 ecclesiastical far-sightedness, court intrigue, and family ambitions, were actively preparing the way for the Austrian alliance in the mephitic air of Versailles. The issue at stake was the maintenance of the supremacy of the Church, and the ancient Christian organisation of France and of Europe.

We now know how this long battle has gone. The Jesuit Churchmen lost their lead, and were thrown back out of the civil and political sphere. We know, too, what effect these blows to the Catholic organisation have had upon the activity of the Catholic idea. With the decline and extermination of the predominance of Churchmen in civil affairs, there began a tendency, which has since become deeper and stronger, in the Church to withdraw herself and her sons from a sphere where she could no longer be sovereign and queen. Religion, since the revolution, isolates the most devout Catholics from political action and political interests. This great change, however, this return of the leaders of the Christian society upon the original conceptions of the Christian faith, did not come to pass in Turgot's time. He watched the struggle of the Church for the maintenance of its temporal privilege and honour, and for the continued protection by secular power of its spiritual supremacy. The outcome of the struggle was later.

We may say, in fine, that if this first public composition of Turgot's is extremely imperfect, it was better to exaggerate the services of Christianity, alike as an internal faith and as a

peculiar form of social organisation, than to describe Gregory the Great and Innocent, Hildebrand and Bernard, as artful and vulgar tyrants, and Aquinas and Roger Bacon as the products of a purely barbarous, stationary, and dark age. There is at first sight something surprising in the respect which Turgot's ablest contemporaries paid to the contributions made to progress by Greece and Rome, compared with their angry disparagement of the dark ages. The reason of this contrast we soon discover to be that the passions of present contests gave their own colour to men's interpretation of the circumstances of the remote middle time, between the Roman Empire and the commencement of the revolutionary period. Turgot escaped these passions more completely than any man of his time who was noble enough to be endowed with the capacity for passion. He never forgot that it is as wise and just to confess the obligations of mankind to the Catholic monotheism of the West, as it is shallow and unjust in professors of Christianity to despise or hate the lower theological systems which guide the humbler families of mankind.

Let us observe that only three years after this academic discourse in praise of the religion of the time, Turgot was declaring that 'the greatest of the services of Christianity to the world was that it had both enlightened and propagated *natural religion*.'[1]

III.

Turgot's inquiry into the extent and quality of the debt of European civilisation to Christianity was marked by a certain breadth and largeness, in spite of the bonds of circumstance and subject—for who, after all, can consider Christianity to any purpose, apart from other conditions of general progress,

[1] *Lettres sur la Tolérance*, II. vol. ii. 687.

or without free comparison with other dogmatic systems? It is not surprising, then, to find the same valuable gifts of vision coming into play with a thousand times greater liberty and power, when the theme was widened so as to comprehend the successive steps of the advancement of the human mind in all its aspects. The Second and more famous of the two Discourses at the Sorbonne was read in December, 1750, and professes to treat the Successive Advances of the Human Mind.[1] The opening lines are among the most pregnant, as they were among the most original, in the history of literature, and reveal in an outline, standing clear against the light, a thought which revolutionised old methods of viewing and describing the course of human affairs, and contained the germs of a new and most fruitful philosophy of society.

'The phenomena of nature, subjected as they are to constant laws, are enclosed in a circle of revolutions that remain the same for ever. All comes to life again, all perishes again; and in these successive generations, by which vegetables and animals reproduce themselves, time does no more than bring back at each moment the image of what it has just dismissed.

'The succession of men, on the contrary, offers from age to age a spectacle of continual variations. Reason, freedom, the passions, are incessantly producing new events. *All epochs are fastened together by a sequence of causes and effects, linking the condition of the world to all the conditions that have gone before it.* The gradually multiplied signs of speech and writing, giving men an instrument for making sure of the continued possession of their ideas, as well as of imparting them to others, have formed out of the knowledge of each individual a common treasure, which generation transmits to generation, as an in-

[1] Sur les progrés successifs de l'esprit humain. *Œuvres*, ii. 597—611.

heritance constantly augmented by the discoveries of each age; and the human race, observed from its first beginning, seems in the eyes of the philosopher to be one vast whole, which, like each individual in it, has its infancy and its growth.'

This was not a mere casual reflection in Turgot's mind, taking a solitary and separate position among those various and unordered ideas, which spring up and go on existing without visible fruit in every active intelligence. It was one of the systematic conceptions which shape and rule many groups of facts, fixing a new and high place of their own for them among the great divisions of knowledge. In a word, it belonged to the rare order of truly creative ideas, and was the root or germ of a whole body of vigorous and connected thought. This quality marks the distinction, in respect of the treatment of history, between Turgot, and both Bossuet and the great writers of history in France and England in the eighteenth century. Many of the sayings to which we are referred for the origin of the modern idea of history, such as Pascal's for instance, are the fortuitous glimpses of men of genius into a vast sea, whose extent they have not been led to suspect, and which only make a passing and momentary mark. Bossuet's talk of universal history, which has been so constantly praised, was fundamentally, and in substance, no more than a bit of theological commonplace splendidly decorated. He did indeed speak of 'the concatenation of human affairs,' but only in the same sentence with 'the sequence of the counsels of God.' The gorgeous rhetorician of the Church was not likely to rise philosophically into the larger air of universal history, properly so called. His famous Discourse is a vindication of divine foresight, by means of an intensely narrow survey of such sets of facts as might be

thought not inconsistent with the deity's fixed purpose to make one final and decisive revelation to men. No one who looks upon the vast assemblage of stupendous human circumstances, from the first origin of man upon the earth, as merely the ordained antecedent of what, seen from the long procession of all the ages, figures in so diminutive a consummation as the Catholic Church, is likely to obtain a very effective hold of that broad sequence and many-linked chain of events, to which Bossuet gave a right name, but whose real meaning he never was even near seizing. His merit is that he did in a small and rhetorical way, what Montesquieu and Voltaire afterwards did in a truly comprehensive and philosophical way; he pressed forward general ideas in connection with the recorded movements of the chief races of mankind. For a teacher of history to leave the bare chronicler's road so far as to declare, for example, the general principle, inadequate and over-stated as it is, that 'religion and civil government are the two points on which human things revolve,'—even this was a clear step in advance. The dismissal of the long series of emperors from Augustus to Alexander Severus in two or three pages was to show a ripe sense of large historic proportion. Again, Bossuet's expressions of 'the concatenation of the universe,' of the interdependence of the parts of so vast a whole, of there coming no great change without having its causes in foregoing centuries, and of the true object of history being to observe, in connection with each epoch, those secret dispositions of events which prepared the way for great changes, as well as the momentous conjunctures which more immediately brought them to pass[1]—all these phrases seem to point to a true and philosophic survey. But they end in themselves, and lead nowhither. The chain is an arbitrary and one-sided collection of facts.

[1] *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle*, part iii. ch. ii.

The writer does not cautiously follow and feel after the successive links, but forges and chooses and arrays them after a pattern of his own, which was fixed independently of them. A scientific term or two is not enough to disguise the purely theological essence of the treatise.

Montesquieu and Voltaire were both far enough removed from Bossuet's point of view, and the *Spirit of Laws* of the one, and the *Essay on the Manners and Character of Nations* of the other, mark a very different way of considering history from the lofty and confident method of the orthodox rhetorician. The *Spirit of Laws* was published in 1748, that is to say a couple of years before Turgot's Discourse at the Sorbonne. Voltaire's *Essay on Manners* did not come out until 1757, or seven years later than the Discourse; but Voltaire himself has told us that its composition dates from 1740, when he prepared this new presentation of European history for the service of Madame du Châtelet.[1] We may hence fairly consider the cardinal work of Montesquieu, and the cardinal historical work of Voltaire, as virtually belonging to the same time. And they possess a leading character in common, which separates them both from Turgot, and places them relatively to his idea in a secondary rank. In a word, Montesquieu and Voltaire, if we have to search their most distinctive quality, introduced into history systematically, and with full and decisive effect, a broad generality of treatment. They grouped the facts of history; and they did not group them locally or in accordance with mere geographical or chronological division, but collected the facts in social classes and orders from many countries and times. Their work was a work of classification. It showed the possibility of arranging the manifold and complex facts of society, and of the movements of com-

[1] Preface to *Essai sur les Mœurs*. *Œuvres*, xx.

munities, under heads and with reference to definite general conditions.

There is no need here to enter into any criticism of Montesquieu's great work, how far the merits of its execution equalled the merit of its design, how far his vicious confusion of the senses of the word 'law' impaired the worth of his book, as a contribution to inductive or comparative history. We have only to seek the difference between the philosophic conception of Montesquieu and the philosophic conception of Turgot. The latter may be considered a more liberal completion of the former. Turgot not only sees the operation of law in the movements and institutions of society, but he interprets this law in a positive and scientific sense, as an ascertainable succession of social states, each of them being the cause and effect of other social states. Turgot gives its deserved prominence to the fertile idea of there being an ordered movement of growth or advance among societies; in other words, of the civilisation of any given portion of mankind having fixed conditions analogous to those of a physical organism. Finally, he does not limit his thought by fixing it upon the laws and constitutions only of countries, but refers historical philosophy to its veritable and widest object and concern, the steps and conditions of the progression of the human mind.

How, he inquires, can we seize the thread of the progress of the human mind? How trace the road, now overgrown and half-hidden, along which the race has travelled? Two ideas suggest themselves, which lay foundations for this inquiry. For one thing, the resources of nature and the fruitful germ of all sorts of knowledge are to be found wherever men are to be found. 'The sublimest attainments are not, and cannot

be, other than the first ideas of sense developed or combined; just as the edifice whose height most amazes the eye, of necessity reposes on the very earth that we tread; and the same senses, the same organs, the spectacle of the same universe, have everywhere given men the same ideas, as the same needs and the same dispositions have everywhere taught them the same arts.' Or it might be put in other words. There is identity in human nature, and repetition in surrounding circumstance means the reproduction of social consequences. For another thing, 'the actual state of the universe, by presenting at the same moment on the earth all the shades of barbarism and civilisation, discloses to us as in a single glance the monuments, the footprints of all the steps of the human mind, the measure of the whole track along which it has passed, the history of all the ages.'

The progress of the human mind means to Turgot the progress of knowledge. Its history is the history of the growth and spread of science and the arts. Its advance is increased enlightenment of the understanding. From Adam and Eve down to Lewis the Fourteenth, the record of progress is the chronicle of the ever-increasing additions to the sum of what men know, and the accuracy and fulness with which they know. The chief instrument in this enlightenment is the rising up from time to time of some lofty and superior intelligence; for though human character contains everywhere the same principle, yet certain minds are endowed with a peculiar abundance of talent that is refused to others. 'Circumstances develop these superior talents, or leave them buried in obscurity; and from the infinite variety of these circumstances springs the inequality among nations.' The agricultural stage goes immediately before a decisively polished state, because it is then first that there is that surplus of means

of subsistence, which allows men of higher capacity the leisure for using it in the acquisition of knowledge, properly so called.

One of the greatest steps was the precious invention of writing, and one of the most rapid was the constitution of mathematical knowledge. The sciences that came next matured more slowly, because in mathematics the explorer has only to compare ideas among one another, while in the others he has to test the conformity of ideas to objective facts. Mathematical truths, becoming more numerous every day, and increasingly fruitful in proportion, lead to the development of hypotheses at once more extensive and more exact, and point to new experiments, which in their turn furnish new problems to solve. 'So necessity perfects the instrument; so mathematics finds support in physics, to which it lends its lamp; so all knowledge is bound together; so, notwithstanding the diversity of their advance, all the sciences lend one another mutual aid; and so, by force of feeling a way, of multiplying systems, of exhausting errors, so to speak, the world at length arrives at the knowledge of a vast number of truths.' It might seem as if a prodigious confusion, as of tongues, would arise from so enormous an advance along so many lines. 'The different sciences, originally confined within a few simple notions common to all, can now, after their advance into more extensive and difficult ideas, only be surveyed apart. But an advance, greater still, brings them together again, because that mutual dependence of all truths is discovered, which, while it links them one to another, throws light on one by another.'

Alas, the history of opinion is, in one of its most extensive branches, the history of error. The senses are the single source of our ideas, and furnish its models to the imagination. Hence that nearly incorrigible disposition to judge what we are ignorant of by what we know; hence those deceptive analogies

to which the primitive rudeness of men surrenders itself. '*As they watched nature, as their eyes wandered to the surface of a profound ocean, instead of the far-off bed hidden under the waters, they saw nothing but their own likeness.* Every object in nature had its god, and this god formed after the pattern of men, had men's attributes and men's vices.'[1] Here, in anthropomorphism, or the transfer of human quality to things not human, and the invention of spiritual existences to be the recipients of this quality, Turgot justly touched the root of most of the wrong thinking that has been as a manacle to science.

His admiration for those epochs in which new truths were most successfully discovered, and old fallacies most signally routed, did not prevent Turgot from appreciating the ages of criticism and their services to knowledge. He does full justice to Alexandria, not only for its astronomy and geometry, but for that peculiar studiousness 'which exercises itself less on things than on books; whose strength lies less in producing and discovering, than in collecting and comparing and estimating what has been produced and discovered; which does not press forward, but gazes backward along the road that has already been traversed. The studies that require most genius, are not always those which imply most progress in the mass of men. There are minds to which nature has given a memory capable of comparing truths, of suggesting an arrangement that places these truths in the fullest light; but to which, at the same time, she has refused that ardour of genius which insists on inventing and opening out for itself new lines of discovery. Made to unite former discoveries under a single point of view, to surround them with light, and to exhibit them in entire perfection, if they are not luminaries that burn and sparkle of themselves, at least they are like diamonds that reflect with dazzling brilliance a borrowed light.'

[1] P. 601.

Thus Turgot's conception of progress regards it mainly, if not entirely, as a gradual dawn and diffusion of light, the spreading abroad of the rays of knowledge. He does not assert, as some moderns have crudely asserted, that morality is of the nature of a fixed quantity; still he hints something of the kind. 'Morality,' he says, speaking of Greece in the time of its early physical speculation, 'though still imperfect, still kept fewer relics of the infancy of reason. Those ever-springing necessities which so incessantly recal man to society, and force him to bend to its laws; that instinct, that sentiment of what is good and right, which Providence has engraved in all hearts, and which precedes reason, all lead the thinkers of every time back to the same fundamental principles of the science of morals.'

We meet with this limitation of the idea of progress in every member of the school to which, more than to any other, Turgot belonged. Even in the vindication of the claims of Christianity to the gratitude of mankind, he had forborne from laying stress on any original contribution, supposed to be made by that religion to the precious stock of ethical ideas. He dwells upon the 'tender zeal for the progress of truth that the Christian religion inspired,' and recounts the various circumstances in which it spread and promoted the social and political conditions most favourable to intellectual or scientific activity. Whatever may be the truth or the value of Christianity as a dogmatic system, there can be little doubt that its weight as a historic force is to be looked for, not so much in the encouragement it gave to science and learning, in respect of which Western Europe probably owes more to Mahometanism, as in the high and generous types of character which it inspired. A man of rare moral depth, warmth, or delicacy, may be a more important element in the advance of

civilisation, than the newest and truest deduction from what Turgot calls 'the fundamental principles of the science of morals.' The leading of souls to do what is right and humane, is always more urgent than mere instruction of the intelligence as to what exactly is the right and the humane. The saint after all has a place in positive history; but the men of the eighteenth century passionately threw him out from their calendar, as the mere wooden idol of superstition. They eagerly recognised the genius of scientific discovery; but they had no eyes for the genius of moral holiness. Turgot, far as he was from many of the narrownesses of his time, yet did not entirely transcend this, the worst of them all. And because he could not perceive there to be any new growths in moral science, he left out from a front place among the forces that have given strength and ripeness to the human mind, the superior capacity of some men for kindling, by word and example, the glowing love and devout practice of morality in the breasts of many generations of their fellows.

The mechanical arts, Turgot says, were preserved in the dark ages by the necessities of existence, and because 'it is impossible but that out of the crowd of artisans practising them, there should arise from time to time one of those men of genius who are found mingled with other men, as gold is found mingled with the earth of a mine.' Surely in the same way holy men arose, with keener feeling for the spiritual necessities of the time, and finer knowledge to train and fit the capacities of human nature to meet these needs, and make their satisfaction the basis for yet loftier standards and holier aspirations and nobler and more careful practice. The work of all such men deserved a place in an outline of the progressive forces of the human mind, as much as the work of those who invented bills of exchange, the art of musical notation, windmills,

clocks, gunpowder, and all the other material instruments for multiplying the powers of man and the convenie[illegible] of life.

Even if we give Turgot the benefit of the doubt whether he intended to describe more than the progress of the human intelligence, or the knowing part of the mind, the omission of the whole moral side is still a defect. For as he interprets knowledge to be the conformity of our ideas to facts, has there not been a clearly recognisable progress in the improved conformity of our ideas to the most momentous facts of all, the various circumstances of human action, its motives and consequences? No factor among the constituents of a progressive civilisation deserves more carefully to be taken into account, than the degree in which the current opinion and usage of a society recognise the comprehensiveness of moral obligation. More than upon anything else, does progress depend on the kinds of conduct which a community classifies as moral or immoral, and upon the wider or narrower inclusiveness within rigid ethical boundaries of what ought or ought not to be left open and indifferent. The conditions which create and modify these ethical regulations,—their law in a word,—form a department of the history of the human mind, which can be almost less readily dispensed with than any other. What sort of a history of Europe would that be, which should omit, for example, to consider the influence of the moral rigour of Calvinism upon the growth of the nations affected by it?

Moreover, Turgot expressly admits the ever-present wants of society to be the stimulating agents, as well as the guides of scientific energy. He expressly admits, too, that they are constantly plucking men by the skirt, and forcing them back to social rules of conduct. It is certain, therefore, that as the necessities of society increase in number and complexity,

morality will be developed to correspond with them, and the way in which new applications of ethical sentiments to the demands of the common weal are made, is as interesting and as deserving of a place in any scientific inquiry into social progress, as the new applications of physical truths to satisfy material needs and to further material convenience. Turgot justly points to the perfecting of language as one of the most important of the many processes that go to the general advancement of the race.[1] Not less, but more, important is the analogous work of perfecting our ideas of virtue and duty. Surely this chamber, too, in the great laboratory deserves that the historian should unseal its door and explore its recesses.

The characteristic merits of the second of the two discourses at the Sorbonne may be briefly described in this way. It recognises the idea of ordered succession in connection with the facts of society. It considers this succession as one, not of superficial events, but of working forces. Thus Bolingbroke, writing fifteen years before, had said that 'as to events that stand recorded in history, we see them all, we see them as they followed one another, or as they produced one another, causes or effects, immediate or remote.'[2] But it is very evident from his illustrations that by all this he understood no more than the immediate connection between one transaction and another. He thought, for example, of the Revolution of 1688 being a consequence of the bad government of James the Second; of this bad government springing from the king's attachment to popery; this in turn being caused by the exile of the royal family; this exile having its source in Cromwell's usurpation; and so forth, one may suppose, down to the Noachian flood, or the era when the earth was formless and

[1] P. 603.

[2] *Study of History*, Letter ii.

void. It is mere futility to talk of cause and effect in connection with a string of arbitrarily chosen incidents of this sort. Cause and effect, in Turgot's sense of history, describe a relation between certain sets or groups of circumstances, that are of a peculiarly decisive kind, because the surface of events conforms itself to their inner working. His account of these deciding circumstances was not what we should be likely to accept now, because he limited them too closely to purely intellectual acquisitions, as we have just seen, and because he failed to see the necessity of tracing the root of the whole growth to certain principles in the mental constitution of mankind. But, at all events, his conception of history rose above merely individual concerns, embraced the successive movements of societies and their relations to one another, and sought the spring of revolutions in the affairs of a community in long trains of preparing conditions, internal and external. Above all, history was a whole. The fortunes and achievements of each nation were scrutinised for their effect on the growth of all mankind.

IV.

In the year 1761, Turgot, then in his thirty-fourth year, was appointed to the office of Intendant in the Generality of Limoges. There were three different divisions of France in the eighteenth century: first and oldest, the diocese or ecclesiastical circumscription; second, the province or military government; and third, the Generality, or a district defined for fiscal and administrative purposes. The Intendant in the government of the last century was very much what the Prefect is in the government of our own time. Perhaps, however, we understand Turgot's position in Limousin best, by comparing it to that of the Chief Commissioner of some great

district in our Indian Empire. For example, the first task which Turgot had to perform was to execute a new land-assessment for purposes of imperial revenue. He had to construct roads, to build barracks, to administer justice, to deal with a famine, just as the English civilian has to do in Orissa or Behar. Much of his time was taken up in elaborate memorials to the central government, and the desk of the controller-general at Versailles was loaded with minutes and reports exactly like the voluminous papers which fill the mahogany boxes of the Members of Council and the Home Secretary at Calcutta. The fundamental conditions of the two systems of government were much alike; absolute political authority, and an elaborately centralized civil administration for keeping order and raising a revenue. The direct authority of an Intendant was not considerable. His chief functions were the settlement of detail in executing the general orders that he received from the minister; a provisional decision on certain kinds of minor affairs; and a power of judging some civil suits, subject to appeal to the Council. But though the Intendant was so strictly a subordinate, yet he was the man of the government, and thoroughly in its confidence. The government only saw with his eyes, and only acted on the faith of his reports, memorials, and requisitions; and this in a country where the government united in itself all forms of power, and was obliged to be incessantly active and to make itself felt at every point.

Of all the thirty-two great districts in which the authority of the Intendant stood between the common people and the authority of the minister at Versailles, the Generality of Limoges was the poorest, the rudest, the most backward, and the most miserable. To the eye of the traveller with a mind for the picturesque, there were parts of this central region of France whose smiling undulations, delicious water-scenes, deep

glens extending into amphitheatres, and slopes hung with woods of chestnut, all seemed to make a lovelier picture than the cheerful beauty of prosperous Normandy, or the olive-groves and orange-gardens of Provence. Arthur Young thought the Limousin the most beautiful part of France. Unhappily for the cultivator, these gracious conformations belonged to a harsh and churlish soil. For him the roll of the chalk and the massing of the granite would have been well exchanged for the fat loams of level Picardy. The soil of the Limousin was declared by its inhabitants to be the most ungrateful in the whole kingdom, returning no more than four net for one of seed sown, while there was land in the vale of the Garonne that returned thirty-fold. The two conditions for raising tolerable crops were abundance of labour and abundance of manure. But misery drove the men away, and the stock were sold to pay the taxes. So the land lacked both the arms of the tiller, and the dressing whose generous chemistry would have transmuted the dull earth into fruitfulness and plenty. The extent of the district was estimated at a million and a half of hectares, equivalent to nearly four millions of English acres: yet the population of this vast tract was only five hundred thousand souls. Even to-day it is not more than eight hundred thousand.

The common food of the people was the chestnut, and to the great majority of them even the coarsest rye-bread was a luxury that they had never tasted. Maize and buckwheat were their chief cereals, and these, together with a coarse radish, took up hundreds of acres that might under a happier system have produced fine wheat and nourished fruit trees. There had once been a certain export of cattle, but that had now come to an end, partly because the general decline of the district had impaired the quality of the beasts, and partly because the Parisian butchers, who were by much the greatest customers, had found

the markets of Normandy more convenient. The more the trade went down, the heavier was the burden of the cattle-tax on the stock that remained. The stock-dealer was thus ruined from both sides at once. In the same way, the Limousin horses, whose breed had been famous all over France, had ceased to be an object of commerce, and the progressive increase of taxation had gradually extinguished the trade. Angoumois, which formed part of the Generality of Limoges, had previously boasted of producing the best and finest paper in the world, and it had found a market not only throughout France, but all over Europe. There had been a time when this manufacture supported sixty mills; at the death of Lewis XIV. their number had fallen from sixty to sixteen. An excise duty at the mill, a duty on exportation at the provincial frontier, a duty on the importation of rags over the provincial frontier,—all these vexations had succeeded in reducing the trade with Holland, one of France's best customers, to one-fourth of its previous dimensions. Nor were paper and cattle the only branches of trade that had been blighted by fiscal perversity. The same burden arrested the transport of saffron across the borders of the province, on its way to Hungary and Prussia and the other cold lands where saffron was a favourite condiment. Salt which came up the Charente from the marshes by the coast, was stripped of all its profit, first by the duty paid on crossing from the Limousin to Périgord and Auvergne, and next by the right possessed by certain of the great lords on the banks of the Charente to help themselves at one point and another to portions of the cargo. Iron was subject to a harassing excise in all those parts of the country that were beyond the jurisdiction of the parlement of Bordeaux. The effect of such positive hindrances as these to the transit of goods was further aided, to the destruction of trade, by the absence of roads.

There were four roads in the province, but all of them so bad that the traveller knew not whether to curse more lustily the rocks or the swamps that interrupted his journey alternately. There were two rivers, the Vienne and the Vézère, and these might seem to an enthusiast for the famous argument from Design, as if Nature had intended them for the transport of timber from the immense forests that crowned the Limousin hills. Unluckily, their beds were so thickly bestrewn with rock that neither of them was navigable for any considerable part of its long course through the ill-starred province.

The inhabitants were as cheerless as the land on which they lived. They had none of the fiery energy, the eloquence, the mobility of the people of the south. Still less were they endowed with the apt intelligence, the ease, the social amiability, the openness, of their neighbours on the north. 'The dwellers in Upper Limousin,' said one who knew them, 'are coarse and heavy, jealous, distrustful, avaricious.' The dwellers in Lower Limousin had a less repulsive address, but they were at least as narrowly self-interested at heart, and they added a capacity for tenacious and vindictive hatred. The Limousins had the superstitious doctrines of other semi-barbarous populations, and they had their vices. They passed abruptly and without remorse from a penitential procession to the tavern and the brothel. Their Christianity was as superficial as that of the peasant of the Eifel in our own day, or of the Finnish converts of whom we are told that they are even now not beyond sacrificing a foal in honour of the Virgin Mary. Saint Martial and Saint Leonard were the patron saints of the country, and were the objects of an adoration in comparison with which the other saints, and even God himself, were thrust into a secondary place.

In short, the people of the Generality of Limoges represented

the most unattractive type of peasantry. They were deeply superstitious, violent in their prejudices, obstinate withstanders of all novelty, rude, dull, stupid, perverse, and hardly redeeming a narrow and blinding covetousness by a stubborn and mechanical industry. Their country has been fixed upon as the cradle of Celtic nationality in France, and there are some who believe that here the old Gaulish blood kept itself purer from external admixture than was the case anywhere else in the land. In our own day, when an orator has occasion to pay a compliment to the townsmen of Limoges, he says that the genius of the people of the district has ever been faithful to its source; it has ever held the balance true between the Frank tradition of the north, and the Roman tradition of the south. This makes an excellent period for a rhetorician, but the fact which it conveys made Limousin all the severer a task for an administrator. Almost immediately after his appointment, Turgot had the chance of being removed to Rouen, and after that to Lyons. Either of these promotions would have had the advantages of a considerable increase of income, less laborious duties, and a much more agreeable residence. Turgot, with a high sense of duty that probably seemed quixotic enough to the Controller-General, declined the preferment, on the very ground of the difficulty and importance of the task that he had already undertaken. '*Poor peasants, poor kingdom!*' had been Quesnai's constant exclamation, and it had sunk deep into the spirit of his disciple. He could have little thought of high salary or personal ease, when he discerned an opportunity of improving the hard lot of the peasant, and softening the misfortunes of the realm.

Turgot was one of the men to whom good government is a religion. It might be said to be the religion of all the best men of that century, and it was natural that it should be so.

The decay of a theology that places our deepest solicitudes in a sphere beyond this, is naturally accompanied by a transfer of these high solicitudes to a nearer scene. But though the desire for good government, and a right sense of its cardinal importance, were common ideas of the time in all the best heads from Voltaire downwards, yet Turgot had a patience which in them was universally wanting. There are two sorts of mistaken people in the world: those who always think that something could and ought to have been done to prevent disaster, and those who always think that nothing could have been done. Turgot was very far removed indeed from the latter class, but, on the other side, he was too sagacious not to know that there are some evils of which we do well to bear a part, as the best means of mitigating the other part. Though he respected the writings of Rousseau and confessed his obligations to them, Turgot abhorred declamation. He had no hope of clearing society of the intellectual and moral débris of ages at a stroke. Nor had he abstract standards of human bliss. The keyword to his political theory was not Pity nor Benevolence, but Justice. 'We are sure to go wrong,' he said once, when pressed to confer some advantage on the poor at the cost of the rich, 'the moment we forget that *justice alone can keep the balance true among all rights and all interests.*' Let us proceed to watch this principle actively applied in a field where it was grievously needed.

As everybody knows, the great fiscal grievance of old France was the *taille*, a tax raised on property and income, but only on the property and income of the unprivileged classes. In the Limousin Turgot's predecessor tried to substitute for the arbitrary *taille*, a tax systematically assessed in proportion to the amount of the person's property. Such a design involved a complete re-measurement and re-valuation of all the

land of the Generality, and this was a task of immense magnitude and difficulty. It was very imperfectly performed, and Turgot found the province groaning under a mass of fiscal anomalies and disorders. Assessment, collection, exemption, were all alike conducted without definite principles or uniform system. Besides these abuses, the total sum demanded from the Generality by the royal government was greatly in excess of the local resources. The district was heavily overcharged, relatively to other districts around it. No deduction had been made from the sum exacted by the treasury, though the falling off in prosperity was great and notorious. Turgot computed that 'the king's share' was as large as that of the proprietors; in other words, taxation absorbed one half of the net products of the land. The government listened to these representations, and conceded to the Generality about half of the remissions that Turgot had solicited. A greater operation was the re-adjustment of the burden, thus lightened, within the province. The people were so irritated by the disorders which had been introduced by the imperfect operation of the proportional *taille*, that with the characteristic impatience of a rude and unintelligent population, they were heedlessly crying out for a return to the more familiar, and therefore more comfortable, disorders of the arbitrary *taille*. Turgot, as was natural, resisted this slovenly reaction, and applied himself with zealous industry to the immense and complex work of effecting a complete revision and settlement of the regulations for assessment, and, what was a more gigantic enterprise, of carrying out a new survey and new valuation of lands and property, to serve as a true base for the application of an equitable assessment. At the end of thirteen years of indomitable toil the work was still unfinished, chiefly owing to want of money for its execution. The court wasted more in a

fortnight in the easy follies of Versailles, than would have given to the Limousin the instrument of a finished scheme of fiscal order. Turgot's labour was not wholly thrown away. The worst abuses were corrected, and the most crying iniquities swept away, save that iniquity of the exemption of the privileged orders, which Turgot could not yet venture to touch.

Let us proceed to another of the master abuses of the old system. The introduction of the Corvée, in the sense in which we have to speak of it, dates no further back than the beginning of the eighteenth century. It was an encroachment and an innovation on the part of the bureaucracy, and the odd circumstance has been remarked that the first mention of the road corvées in any royal Act is the famous edict of 1776, which suppressed them. Until the Regency this famous word had described only the services owed by dependents to their lords. It meant so many days' labour on the lord's lands, and so many offices of domestic duty. When, in the early part of the century, the advantages of a good system of high-roads began to be perceived by the government, the convenient idea came into the heads of the more ingenious among the Intendants of imposing, for the construction of the roads, a royal or public corvée analogous to that of private feudalism. Few more mischievous imposts could have been devised.

That undying class who are contented with the shallow presumptions of *à priori* reasoning in economic matters, did, it is true, find specious pleas even for the road corvée. There has never been an abuse in the history of the world, for which something good could not be said. If men earned money by labour and the use of their time, why not require from them time and labour instead of money? By the latter device, are we not assured against malversation of the funds? Those who substitute words for things, and verbal plausibilities for the

observation of experience, could prolong these arguments indefinitely. The evils of the road corvée meanwhile remained patent and indisputable. In England at the same period, it is true, the country people were obliged to give six days in the year to the repair of the highways, under the management of the justices of the peace. And in England the business was performed without oppression. But then this only illustrates the unwisdom of arguing about economic arrangements in the abstract. All depends on the conditions by which the given arrangement is surrounded, and a practice that in England was merely clumsy, was in France not only clumsy but a gross cruelty. There the burden united almost all the follies and iniquities with which a public service could be loaded. The French peasant had to give, not six, but twelve or fifteen days of labour every year for the construction and repair of the roads of his neighbourhood. If he had a horse and cart, they too were pressed into the service. He could not choose the time, and he was constantly carried away at the moment when his own poor harvest needed his right arm and his supervision. He received no pay, and his days on the roads were days of hunger to himself and his family. He had the bitterness of knowing that the advantage of the high-road was slight, indirect, and sometimes null to himself, while it was direct and great to the town merchants and the country gentlemen, who contributed not an hour nor a sou to the work. It was exactly the most indigent upon whose backs this slavish load was placed. There were a hundred abuses of spite or partiality, of favouritism or vengeance, in the allotment of the work. The wretch was sent to the part of the road most distant from his own house; or he was forced to work for a longer time than fell fairly to his share; or he saw a neighbour allowed to escape on payment of a sum of money. And at the end of all

the roads were vile. The labourers, having little heart in work for which they had no wage, and weakened by want of food, did badly what they had to do. There was no scientific superintendence, no skilled direction, no system in the construction, no watchfulness as to the maintenance. The rains of winter and the storms of summer did damage that one man could have repaired by careful industry from day to day, and that for lack of this one man went on increasing, until the road fell into holes, the ditches got filled up, and deep pools of water stood permanently in the middle of the highway. The rich disdained to put a hand to the work; the poor, aware that they would be forced to the hated task in the following autumn or spring, naturally attended to their own fields, and left the roads to fall to ruin.

It need not be said that this barbarous slovenliness and disorder meant an incredible waste of resources. It was calculated that a contractor would have provided and maintained fine roads for little more than one-third of the cost at which the corvée furnished roads that were execrable. Condorcet was right in comparing the government in this matter to a senseless fellow, who indulges in all the more lavish riot, because by paying for nothing, and getting everything at a higher price on credit, he is never frightened into sense by being confronted with a budget of his prodigalities.

It takes fewer words to describe Turgot's way of dealing with this oriental mixture of extravagance, injustice, and squalor. The Intendant of Caen had already proposed to the inhabitants of that district the alternative plan of commuting the corvée into a money payment. Turgot adopted and perfected this great transformation. He substituted for personal service on the roads a yearly rate, proportional in amount to the *taille*. He instituted a systematic survey and direction of the

roads, existing or required in the Generality, and he committed the execution of the approved plans to contractors on exact and business-like principles. The result of this change was not merely an immense relief to the unfortunate men who had been every year harassed to death and half-ruined by the old method of forced labour, but so remarkable an improvement both in the goodness and extension of the roads, that when Arthur Young went over them five and twenty years afterwards, he pronounced them by far the noblest public ways to be found anywhere in France.

Two very instructive facts may be mentioned in connection with the suppression of the corvées in the Limousin. The first is that the central government assented to the changes proposed by the young Intendant, as promptly as if it had been a committee of the Convention, instead of being the nominee of an absolute king. The other is that the people in the country, when Turgot had his plans laid before them in their parish meetings held after mass on Sundays, listened with the keenest distrust and suspicion to what they insisted on regarding as a sinister design for exacting more money from them. Well might Condorcet say that very often it needs little courage to do men harm, for they constantly suffer harm tranquilly enough; but when you take it into your head to do them some service, then they revolt and accuse you of being an innovator. It is fair, however, to remember how many good grounds the French countryman had for distrusting the professions of any agent of the government. For even in the case of this very reform, though Turgot was able to make an addition to the *taille* in commutation of the work on the roads, he was not able to force a contribution, either to the *taille* or any other impost, from the privileged classes, the very persons who were best able to pay. This is only an illustration of what is now a

well-known fact, that revolution was made necessary less by despotism, than by privilege on the one side, and by intense political distrust on the other side.

Turgot was thoroughly awake to the necessity of penetrating public opinion. The first principle of the school of Economists was an 'enlightened people.' Nothing was to be done by them; everything was to be done for them. But they were to be trained to understand the grounds of the measures which a central authority conceived, shaped, and carried into practice. Rousseau was the only writer of the revolutionary school who had the modern democratic faith in the virtue and wisdom of the common people. Voltaire habitually spoke of their bigotry and prejudice with the natural bitterness of a cultivated man towards the incurable vices of ignorance. The Economists admitted Voltaire's view as true of an existing state of things, but they looked to education, meaning by that something more than primary instruction, to lead gradually to the development of sound political intelligence. Hence when Turgot came into full power as the minister of Lewis XVI., twelve years after he first went to his obscure duties in the Limousin, he introduced the method of prefacing his edicts by an elaborate statement of the reasons on which their policy rested. And on the same principle he now adopted the only means at his disposal for instructing and directing opinion. The book-press was at that moment doing tremendous work among the classes with education and leisure. But the newspaper press hardly existed, and even if it had existed, however many official journals Turgot might have had under his inspiration, the people whose minds he wished to affect were unable to read. There was only one way of reaching them, and that was through the priests. Religious life among the Limousins was, as we have seen, not very pure, but it is a

significant law of human nature that the less pure a religion is, the more important in it is the place of the priest and his office. Turgot pressed the curés into friendly service. It is a remarkable fact, not without a parallel in other parts of modern history, that of the two great conservative corporations of society, the lawyers did all they could to thwart his projects, and the priests did all they could to advance them. In truth the priests are usually more or less sympathetic towards any form of centralized authority ; it is only when the people take their own government into their own hands, that the clergy are sure to turn cold or antipathetic towards improvement. There is one other reservation, as Turgot found out in 1775, when he had been transferred to a greater post, and the clergy had joined his bitterest enemies. Then he touched the corporate spirit, and perceived that for authority to lay a hand on ecclesiastical privilege is to metamorphose goodwill into the most rancorous malignity. Meanwhile, the letters in which Turgot explained his views and wishes to the curés, by them to be imparted to their parishes, are masterpieces of the care, the patience, the interest, of a good ruler. Those impetuous and peremptory spirits who see in Frederick or Napoleon the only born rulers of men, might find in these letters, and in the acts to which they refer, the memorials of a far more admirable and beneficent type.

The corvée, vexatious as it was, yet excited less violent heats and inflicted less misery than the abuses of military service. There had been a militia in the country as far back as the time of the Merovingians, but the militia-service with which Turgot had to deal, only dated from 1726. Each parish was bound to supply its quota of men to this service, and the obligation was perhaps the most odious grievance, though not the most really

mischievous, of all that then afflicted the realm. The hatred which it raised was due to no failure of the military spirit in the people. From Frederick the Great downwards, everybody was well aware that the disasters to France which had begun with the shameful defeat of Rossbach and ended with the loss of Canada in the west and the Indies in the east (1757—1763), were due to no want of valour in the common soldier. It was the generals, as Napoleon said fifty years afterwards, who were incapable and inept. And it was the ineptitude of the administrative chiefs that made the militia at once ineffective and abhorred. First, they allowed a great number of classified exemptions from the ballot. The noble, the tonsured clerk, the counsellor, the domestic of noble, tonsured clerk, and counsellor, the eldest son of the lawyer and the farmer, the tax-collector, the schoolmaster, were all exempt. Hence the curse of service was embittered by a sense of injustice. This was one of the many springs in the old régime that fed the swelling and vehement stream of passion for social equality, until at length when the day came, it made such short and furious work with the structure of envious partition between citizen and citizen.

Again, by a curious perversity of official pedantry, the government insisted on each man who drew the black ticket in the abhorred lottery, performing his service in person. It forbade substitution. Under a modern system of universal military service, this is perfectly intelligible and just. But, as we have seen, military service was only made obligatory on those who were already ground down by hardships. As a consequence of this prohibition, those who were liable to be drawn lived in despair, and as no worse thing than the black ticket could possibly befall them, they had every inducement to run away from their own homes and villages. At the approach of the commissary of the government, they fled into the woods

and marshes, as if they had been pursued by the plague. This was a signal for a civil war on a small scale. Those who were left behind, and whose chance of being drawn was thus increased, hastened to pursue the fugitives with such weapons as came to their hands. In the Limousin the country was constantly the scene of murderous disorders of this kind. What was worse, was not only that the land was infested by vagabonds and bad characters, but that villages became half depopulated, and the soil lost its cultivators. Finally, as is uniformly the case in the history of bad government, an unjust method produced a worthless machine. The *milice* supplied as bad troops as the *corvée* supplied bad roads. The force was recruited from the lowest class of the population, and as soon as its members had learned a little drill, they were discharged and their places taken by raw batches provided at random by blind lot.

Turgot proposed that a character both of permanence and locality should be given to the provincial force; that each parish or union of parishes should be required to raise a number of men; that these men should be left at home and in their own districts, and only called out for exercise for a certain time each year; and that they should be retained as a reserve force by a small payment. In this way, he argued that the government would secure a competent force, and by stimulating local pride and point of honour would make service popular instead of hateful. As the government was too weak and distracted to take up so important a scheme as this, Turgot was obliged to content himself with evading the existing regulations; and it is a curious illustration of the pliancy of Versailles, that he should have been allowed to do so openly and without official remonstrance. He permitted the victim of the ballot to provide a voluntary substitute, and he permitted the parish to tempt substitutes by payment of a sum of money on

enrolment. This may seem a very obvious course to follow; but no one who has tried to realize the strength and obstinacy of routine, will measure the service of a reformer by the originality of his ideas. In affairs of government, the priceless qualities are not merely originality of resource, but a sense for things that are going wrong, and a sufficiently vigorous will to set them right.

One general expression serves to describe this most important group of Turgot's undertakings. The reader has probably already observed that what Turgot was doing, was to take that step which is one of the most decisive in the advance of a society to a highly organized industrial stage. He displaced imposts in kind, that rudest and most wasteful form of contribution to the public service, and established in their stead a system of money payments, and of having the work of the government done on commercial principles. Thus, as if it were not enough to tear the peasant away from the soil to serve in the militia, as if it were not enough to drag away the farmer and his cattle to the public highways, the reigning system struck a third blow at agriculture by requiring the people of the localities that happened to be traversed by a regiment on the march, to supply their waggons and horses and oxen for the purposes of military transport. In this case, it is true, a certain compensation in money was allowed, but how inadequate was this insignificant allowance, we may easily understand. The payment was only for one day, but the day's march was often of many miles, and the oxen, which in the Limousin mostly did the work of horses, were constantly seen to drop down dead in the roads. There was not only the one day's work. Often two, three, or five days were needed to reach the place of appointment, and for these days not even the paltry twenty sous were granted. Nor could

any payment of this kind recompense the peasant for the absence of his beasts of burden on the great days when he wanted to plough his fields, to carry the grain to the barns, or to take his produce to market. The obvious remedy here, as in the corvées, was to have the transport effected by a contractor, and to pay him out of a rate levied on the persons liable. This was what Turgot ordered to be done.

Of one other burden of the same species he relieved the cultivator. This unfortunate being was liable to be called upon to collect, as well as to pay, the taxes. Once nominated, he became responsible for the amount at which his commune was assessed. If he did not produce the sum, he lost his liberty. If he advanced it from his own pocket, he lost at least the interest on the money. In collecting the money from his fellow taxpayers, he not only incurred bitter and incessant animosities, but, what was harder to bear, he lost the priceless time of which his own land was only too sorely in need. In the Limousin the luckless creature had a special disadvantage, for here the collector of the *taille* had also to collect the twentieths, and the twentieths were a tax for which even the privileged classes were liable. They, as might be supposed, cavilled, disputed, and appealed. The appeal lay to a sort of county board, which was composed of people of their own kind, and before which they too easily made out a plausible case against a clumsy collector, who more often than not knew neither how to read nor to write. Turgot's reform of a system which was always harassing and often ruinous to an innocent individual, consisted in the creation of the task of collection into a distinct and permanent office, exercised over districts sufficiently large to make the poundage, out of which the collectors were paid, an inducement to persons of intelligence and spirit to undertake the office as a profession. However

moderate and easy each of these reforms may seem by itself, yet any one may see how the sum of them added to the prosperity of the land, increased the efficiency of the public service, and tended to lessen the grinding sense of injustice among the common people.

Apart from these, the greatest and most difficult of all Turgot's administrative reforms, we may notice in passing his assiduity in watching for the smaller opportunities of making life easier to the people of his province. His private benevolence was incessant and marked. One case of its exercise carries our minds at a word into the very midst of the storm of fire which purified France of the evil and sordid elements, that now and for his life lay like a mountain of lead on all Turgot's aims and efforts. A certain foreign contractor at Limoges was ruined by the famine of 1770. He had a clever son, whom Turgot charitably sent to school, and afterwards to college in Paris. The youth grew up to be the most eloquent and dazzling of the Girondins, the high-souled Vergniaud. It was not, however, in good works of merely private destination that Turgot mostly exercised himself. In 1767 the district was infested by wolves. The Intendant imposed a small tax for the purpose of providing rewards for the destruction of these tormentors, and in reading the minutes on the subject we are reminded of the fact, which was not without its significance when the peasants rose in vengeance on their lords two and twenty years later, that the dispersion of the hamlets and the solitude of the farms had made it customary for the people to go about with fire-arms. Besides encouraging the destruction of noxious beasts, Turgot did something for the preservation of beasts not noxious. The first veterinary school in France had been founded at Lyons in 1762. To this he sent pupils from his province, and eventually he

founded a similar school at Limoges. He suppressed a tax on cattle, which acted prejudicially on breeding and grazing; and he introduced clover into the grass-lands. The potato had been unknown in Limousin. It was not common in any part of France; and perhaps this is not astonishing when we remember that the first field crop even in agricultural Scotland is supposed only to have been sown in the fourth decade of that century. People would not touch it, though the experiment of persuading them to cultivate this root had been frequently tried. In the Limousin the people were even more obstinate in their prejudice than elsewhere. But Turgot persevered, knowing how useful potatoes would be in a land where scarcity of grain was so common. The ordinary view was that they were hardly fit for pigs, and that in human beings they would certainly breed leprosy. Some of the English Puritans would not eat potatoes because they are not mentioned in the Bible, and that is perhaps no better a reason than the other. When, however, it was seen that the Intendant had the hated vegetable served every day at his own table, the opposition grew more faint; men were at last brought to consent to use potatoes for their cattle, and after a time even for themselves.

It need scarcely be said that among Turgot's efforts for agricultural improvement, was the foundation of an agricultural society. This was the time when the passion for provincial academies of all sorts was at its height. When we consider that Turgot's society was not practical but deliberative, and what themes he proposed for discussion by it, we may believe that it was one of the less useful of his works. What the farmers needed was something much more directly instructive in the methods of their business, than could come of discussions as to the effects of indirect taxation on the revenues of landowners, or the right manner of valuing the income of land

in the different kinds of cultivation. 'In that most unlucky path of French exertion,' says Arthur Young, 'this distinguished patriot was able to do nothing. This society does like other societies; they meet, converse, offer premiums, and publish nonsense. This is not of much consequence, for the people instead of reading their memoirs are not able to read at all. They can, however, *see*, and if a farm was established in that good cultivation which they ought to copy, something would be presented from which they *might* learn. I asked particularly if the members of this society had land in their own hands, and was assured that they had; but the conversation presently explained it. They had *métayers* round their country seats, and this was considered as farming their own lands, so that they assume something of a merit from the identical circumstance, which is the curse and ruin of the whole country.'

The record of what Turgot did for manufacturing industry and commerce is naturally shorter than that of his efforts for the relief of the land and its cultivators. In the eyes of the modern economist, with his horror of government encouragement to industry, no matter in what time, place, or circumstance, some of Turgot's actions will seem of doubtful wisdom. At Brives, for example, with all the authority of an Intendant, he urged the citizens to provide buildings for carrying on a certain manufacture which he and others thought would be profitable to the town; and as the money for the buildings did not come in very readily, he levied a rate both on the town and on the inhabitants of the suburbs. His argument was that the new works would prove indirectly beneficial to the whole neighbourhood. He was not long, however, in finding out, as the authors of such a policy generally find out, how difficult it is to reconcile the interests of aided manufactures with those of the taxpayers. It is characteristic, we may remark, of the want

of public spirit in the great nobles, that one of Turgot's first difficulties in the affair was to defeat an unjust claim made by no less a personage than the Marshal de Noailles, to a piece of public land on which the proposed works were to be built. A more important industry in the history of Limoges sprang from the discovery, during Turgot's tenure of office, of the china clay which has now made the porcelain of Limoges only second among the French potteries to that of Sèvres itself. The modern pottery has been developed since the close of the Revolution, which checked the establishments and processes that had been directed, encouraged, and supervised by Turgot.

To his superior enlightenment in another part of the commercial field we owe one of the most excellent of Turgot's pieces, his Memorial on Loans of Money. This plea for free trade in money has all the sense and liberality of the brightest side of the eighteenth-century illumination. It was suggested by the following circumstance. At Angoulême four or five rogues associated together, and drew bills on one another. On these bills they borrowed money, the average rate of interest being from eight to ten per cent. When the bills fell due, instead of paying them, they laid informations against the lenders for taking more than the legal rate of interest. The lenders were ruined, persons who had money were afraid to make advances, bills were protested, commercial credit was broken, and the trade of the district was paralysed. Turgot prevailed upon the Council of State to withdraw the cases from the local jurisdiction; the proceedings against the lenders were annulled, and the institution of similar proceedings forbidden. This was a characteristic course. The royal government was generally willing in the latter half of the eighteenth century to redress a given case of abuse, but it never felt itself strong enough, or had leisure enough, to deal with the general

source from which the particular grievance sprang. Turgot's Memorial is as cogent an exposure of the mischief of Usury Laws to the public prosperity, as the more renowned pages either of Bentham or J. B. Say on the same subject, and it has the merit of containing an explanation at once singularly patient and singularly intelligent, of the origin of the popular feeling about usury and its adoption by the legislator.

After he had been eight years at his post, Turgot was called upon to deal with the harassing problems of a scarcity of food. In 1770 even the maize and black grain, and the chestnuts on which the people supported life, failed almost completely, and the failure extended over two years. The scarcity very speedily threatened to become a famine, and all its conditions were exasperated by the unwisdom of the authorities, and the selfish rapacity of the landlords. It needed all the firmness and all the circumspection of which Turgot was capable, to overcome the difficulties which the strong forces of ignorance, prejudice, and greediness raised up against him.

His first battle was on an issue which is painfully familiar to our own Indian administrators at the present time. In 1764, an edict had been promulgated decreeing free trade in grain, not with foreign countries, but among the different provinces of the kingdom. This edict had not made much way in the minds either of the local officials or of the people at large, and the presence of famine made the free and unregulated export of food seem no better than a cruel and outrageous paradox. The parlement of Bordeaux at once suspended the edict of 1764. They ordered that all dealers in grain, farmers of land, owners of land, of whatever rank, quality, or condition, should forthwith convey to the markets of their district '*a sufficient quantity*' of grain to provision the said markets. The same persons were forbidden to sell either

by wholesale or retail any portion of the said grain at their own granaries. Turgot at once procured from the Council at Versailles the proper instrument for checking this impolitic interference with the free circulation of grain, and he contrived this instrument in such conciliatory terms as to avoid any breach with the parlement, whose motives, for that matter, were respectable enough. In spite, however, of the action of the government, popular feeling ran high against free markets. Tumultuous gatherings of famishing men and women menaced the unfortunate grain-dealers. Waggoners engaged in carrying grain away from a place where it was cheaper, to another place where it was dearer, were violently arrested in their business, and terrified from proceeding. Hunger prevented people from discerning the unanswerable force of the argument that if the grain commanded a higher price somewhere else, that was a sure sign of the need there being more dire. The local officials were as hostile as their humbler neighbours. At the town of Turenne, they forbade grain to be taken away, and forced the owners of it to sell it on the spot at the market rate. At the town of Angoulême the lieutenant of police took upon himself to order that all the grain destined for the Limousin should be unloaded and stored at Angoulême. Turgot brought a heavy hand to bear on these breakers of administrative discipline, and readily procured such sanction as his authority needed from the Council.

One of the most interesting of the measures to which Turgot resorted in meeting the destitution of the country, was the establishment of the Charitable Workshops. Some of the advocates of the famous National Workshops of 1848 have appealed to this example of the severe patriot, for a sanction to their own economic policy. It is not clear that the logic of the Socialist is here more remorseless than usual. If the State

may set up workshops to aid people who are short of food because the harvest has failed, why should it not do the same when people are short of food because trade is bad, work scarce, and wages intolerably low? Of course Turgot's answer would have been that remorseless logic is the most improper instrument in the world for a business of rough expedients, such as government is. There is a vital difference in practice between opening a public workshop in the exceptional emergency of a famine, and keeping public workshops open as a normal interference with the free course of industrial activity. For the moment the principle may appear to be the same, but in reality the application of the principle means in the latter case the total disorganization of industry; in the former it means no more than a temporary breach of the existing principles of organization, with a view to its speedier revival. To invoke Turgot as a dabbler in Socialism because he opened *ateliers de charité*, is as unreasonable as it would be to make an English minister who should suspend the Bank Charter Act in a crisis, into the champion of an inconvertible paper currency. Turgot always regarded the sums paid in his works, not as wages, but as alms. All that he urged was that 'the best and most useful kind of alms consists in providing means for earning them.' To prevent the workers from earning aid with as little trouble to themselves as possible, he recommended payment by the piece and not by the day. To check workers from flocking in from their regular employments, he insisted on the wages being kept below the ordinary rate, and he urged the propriety of driving as sharp bargains as possible in fixing the price of the piece of work. To prevent the dissipation of earnings at the tavern, he paid not in money, but in leathern tokens, that were only current in exchange for provisions. All these regulations mark a wide gulf between the Economist of 1770

and the Socialist of 1848. Nobody was sterner than Turgot against beggars, the inevitable scourge of every country where the evils of vicious economic arrangements are aggravated by the mischievous views of the Catholic clergy, first, as to the duties of promiscuous almsgiving, and second, as to the virtue of improvident marriages. In 1614 the States General had been for hanging all mendicants, and Colbert had sent them to the galleys. Turgot was less rigorous than that, but he would not suffer his efforts for the economic restoration of his province to be thwarted by the influx of these devouring parasites, and he sent every beggar on whom hands could be laid to prison.

The story of the famine in the Limousin brings to light some instructive facts as to the temper of the lords and rich proprietors on the eve of the changes that were to destroy them. Turgot had been specially anxious that as much as possible of what was necessary for the relief of distress should be done by private persons. He knew the straits of the government. He knew how hard it would be to extract from it the means of repairing a deficit in his own finances. Accordingly he invited the landowners, not merely to contribute sums of money in return for the public works carried on in their neighbourhood, but also, by way of providing employment to their indigent neighbours, to undertake such works as they should find convenient on their own estates. The response was disappointing. 'The districts,' he wrote in 1772, 'where I have works on foot, do not give me reason to hope for much help on the side of the generosity of the nobles and the rich landowners. The Prince de Soubise is so far the only person who has given anything for the works that have been executed in his duchy.' Nor was abstinence from generosity the worst part of this failure in public spirit. The same nobles and landowners who refused to

give, did not refuse to take away. Most of them proceeded at once to dismiss their *métayers*, the people who farmed their lands in consideration of a fixed proportion of the produce. Turgot, in an ordinance of admirable gravity, remonstrated against this harsh and impolitic proceeding. He pointed out that the unfortunate wretches, thus stripped of every resource, would have to leave the district, abandoning their wives and children to the charity of villages that were already overburdened with the charge of their own people. To cast this additional load on the villages was all the more unjust, because the owners of land had been exempted from one-half of the taxes levied on the owners of other property, exactly because the former were expected to provide for their own peasants. It was a claim less of humanity than of bare justice, that the landowners should do something for men with whom their relations had been so close as to be almost domestic, and to whose hard toil their masters owed all that they possessed. As a mere matter of self-interest, moreover, apart alike from both justice and humanity, the death or flight of the labourers would leave the proprietors helpless when the next good season came, and for want of hands the land would be doomed to barrenness for years to come, to the grievous detriment no less of the landowners than of the whole people of the realm. Accordingly, Turgot ordered all those who had dismissed their *métayers* to take them back again, and he enacted generally that all proprietors, of whatever quality or condition, and whether privileged or not, should be bound to keep and support until the next harvest all the labourers who had been on their land in the previous October, as well women and children as men.

Turgot's policy in this matter is more instructive as to the social state of France, than it may at first sight appear. At

first sight we are astonished to find the austere economist travelling so far from the orthodox path of free contract as to order a landowner to furnish at his own cost subsistence for his impoverished tenants. But the truth is that the *métayer* was not a free tenant in the sense which we attach to the word. '*In Limousin*,' says Arthur Young, '*the métayers are considered as little better than menial servants.*' And it is not going beyond the evidence to say that they were even something lower than menial servants; they were really a kind of serf-caste. They lived in the lowest misery. More than half of them were computed to be deeply in debt to the proprietors. In many cases they were even reduced every year to borrow from their landlord, before the harvest came round, such coarse bread of mixed rye and barley as he might choose to lend them. What Turgot therefore had in his mind was no relation of free contract, though it was that legally, but a relation which partly resembled that of a feudal lord to his retainer, and partly—as Sir Henry Maine has hinted—that of a planter to his negroes. It is less surprising, then, that Turgot should have enforced some of the responsibilities of the lord and the planter.

The nobles had resort to a still more indefensible measure than the expulsion of their *métayers*. Most of the lands in the Generality of Limoges were charged with dues in kind payable to the lords. As the cultivators had for the most part no grain even for their own bread, they naturally had no grain for the lord's dues. The lords then insisted on payment in cash, and they insisted on estimating this payment at the famine price of the grain. Most of them were really as needy as they were idle and proud, and nothing is so inordinately grasping as the indigence of class-pride. The effect of their proceedings now was to increase their revenue fourfold and fivefold out of public calamity and universal misery. And unfortunately the liability

of the cultivators in a given manor was *solidaire;* they were jointly and severally responsible, and the effect of this was that even those who were in circumstances to pay the quadrupled dues, were ruined and destroyed without mercy in consequence of having also to pay the quadrupled dues of their beggared neighbours. Turgot arrested this odious process by means of an old and forgotten decree, which he prevailed upon the parlement of Bordeaux to revive in good and due form, to the effect that the arrears of dues in kind for 1769 should be paid at the market price of grain when the dues were payable; that is, before the scarcity had declared itself.

When we consider the grinding and extortionate spirit thus shown in face of a common calamity, we may cease to wonder at the ferocity with which, when the hour struck, the people tore away privilege, distinction, and property itself from classes that had used all three only to ruin the land and crush its inhabitants into the dust. And the moment that the lord had thus transformed himself into a mere creditor, and a creditor for goods delivered centuries ago, and long since consumed and forgotten, then it was certain that, if political circumstances favoured the growing economic sentiment, there would be heard again the old cry of the Roman plebs for an agrarian law and *novæ tabulæ.* Nay, something was heard that is amazingly like the cry of the modern Irish peasant. In 1776 two noteworthy incidents happened. A certain Marquis de Vibraye threw into prison a peasant who refused to pay the *droit de cens.* Immediately between thirty and forty peasants came to the rescue, armed themselves, besieged the chateau, took it and sacked it, and drove the Marquis de Vibraye away in terror. Still more significant is the second incident, which happened shortly after. A relative of the Duke of Mortemart, shooting on his property, was attacked by peasants who insisted

that he should cease his sport. They treated him with much brutality, and even threatened to fire on him and his attendants, '*claiming to be free masters of their lands.*' Here was the main root of the great French Revolution. A fair consideration of the details of such an undertaking as Turgot's administration of the Limousin helps us to understand two things: first, that all the ideas necessary for the pacific transformation of French society were there in the midst of it; second, that the system of privilege had fostered such a spirit in one class, and the reaction against the inconsiderate manifestation of that spirit was so violent in the other class, that good political ideas were vain and inapplicable.

It is curious to find that, in the midst of his beneficent administration, Turgot was rating practical work very low in comparison with the achievements of the student and the thinker. 'You are very fortunate,' Condorcet said to him, 'in having a passion for the public good, and in being able to satisfy it; it is a great consolation, and of a very superior order to the consolation of mere study.' 'Nay,' replied Turgot, in his next letter, 'whatever you may say, I believe that the satisfaction derived from study is superior to any other kind of satisfaction. I am perfectly convinced that one may be, through study, a thousand times more useful to men than in any of our subordinate posts. There we torment ourselves, and often without any compensating success, to secure some small benefits, while we are the involuntary instrument of evils that are by no means small. All our small benefits are transitory, while the light that a man of letters is able to diffuse must, sooner or later, destroy all the artificial evils of the human race, and place it in a position to enjoy all the goods that nature offers.' It is clear that we can only accept Turgot's preference, on condition that the man of letters is engaged on work that

seriously advances social interests and adds something to human stature. Most literature, nearly all literature, is distinctly subordinate and secondary; it only serves to pass the time of the learned or cultured class, without making any definite mark either on the mental habits of men and women, or on the institutions under which they live. Compared with such literature as this, the work of an administrator who makes life materially easier and more hopeful to the half million of persons living in the Generality of Limoges or elsewhere, must be pronounced emphatically the worthier and more justly satisfactory.[1]

Turgot himself, however, found time, in his industry at Limoges, to make a contribution to a kind of literature which has seriously modified the practical arrangements and social relations of the western world. In 1766 he published his Essay on the Formation and Distribution of Wealth—a short but most pithy treatise, in which he anticipated some of the leading economic principles of that greater work by Adam Smith, which was given to the world ten years later. Turgot's Essay has none of the breadth of historic outlook, and none of the amplitude of concrete illustrations from real affairs, which make the Wealth of Nations so deeply fertile, so persuasive, so interesting, so thoroughly alive, so genuinely enriching to the understanding of the judicious reader. But the comparative dryness of Turgot's too concise form does not blind the historian of political economy to the merit of the substance of his propositions. It was no small proof of originality and enlightenment to precede Adam Smith by ten years in the doctrines of free trade, of free industry, of loans on interest, of the constitutive elements of price, of the effects of the division of labour, of the processes of the formation of capital.

[1] See below, p. 401.

The passage on interest will bear reproducing once more:—'We may regard the rate of interest as a kind of level, below which all labour, all cultivation, all industry, all commerce ceases. It is like a sea spreading out over a vast district; the tops of the mountains rise above the waters and form fertile and cultivated islands. If the sea by any chance finds an outlet, then in proportion as it goes down, first the slopes, next the plains and valleys, appear and clothe themselves with productions of every kind. It is enough that the sea rises or falls by a foot, to inundate vast shores, or to restore them to cultivation and plenty.' There are not many illustrations at once so apt and so picturesque as this, but most of the hundred paragraphs that make up the Reflections are, notwithstanding one or two of the characteristic crotchets of Quesnai's school, both accurate and luminous.

V.

In May, 1774, Lewis XV. died. His successor was only twenty years old; he was sluggish in mind, vacillating in temper, and inexperienced in affairs. Maurepas was recalled, to become the new king's chief adviser; and Maurepas, at the suggestion of one of Turgot's college friends, summoned the Intendant from Limoges, and placed him at the head of the department of marine. This post Turgot only held for a couple of months; he was then preferred to the great office of Controller-General. The condition of the national finance made its administration the most important of all the departments of the government. Turgot's policy in this high sphere belongs to the general history of France, and there is no occasion for us to reproduce its details here. It was mainly an attempt to extend over the whole realm the kind of reforms

which had been tried on a small scale in the Limousin. He suppressed the corvées, and he tacked the money payment which was substituted for that burden on to the Twentieths, an impost from which the privileged class was not exempt. 'The weight of this charge,' he made the king say in the edict of suppression, 'now falls and must fall only on the poorest classes of our subjects.' This truth only added to the exasperation of the rich, and perhaps might well have been omitted. Along with the corvées were suppressed the jurandes, or exclusive industrial corporations or trade-guilds, whose monopolies and restrictions were so mischievous an impediment to the well-being of the country. In the preamble to this edict we seem to be breathing the air, not of Versailles in 1775, but of the Convention in 1793:—'God, when he made man with wants, and rendered labour an indispensable resource, made the right of work the property of every individual in the world, and this property is the first, the most sacred, and the most imprescriptible of all kinds of property. We regard it as one of the first duties of our justice, and as one of the acts most of all worthy of our benevolence, to free our subjects from every infraction of that inalienable right of humanity.'

Again, Turgot removed a tax from certain forms of lease, with a view to promote the substitution of a system of farming for the system of *métayers*. He abolished an obstructive privilege by which the Hôtel Dieu had the exclusive right of selling meat during Lent. The whole of the old incoherent and vexatious police of the corn-markets was swept away. Finally, he inspired the publication of a short but most important writing, Boncerf's *Inconvénients des Droits Féodaux*, in which, without criticising the origin of the privileges of the nobles, the author showed how much it would be to the advantage of the lords to accept a commutation of their feudal dues. What was still

more exasperating both to nobles and lawyers, was the author's hardy assertion that if the lords refused the offer of their vassals, the king had the power to settle the question for them by his own legislative authority. This was the most important and decisive of the pre-revolutionary tracts.

Equally violent prejudices and more sensitive interests were touched by two other sets of proposals. The minister began to talk of a new territorial contribution, and a great survey and re-assessment of the land. Then followed an edict restoring in good earnest the free circulation of corn within the kingdom. Turgot was a partisan of free-trade in its most entire application; but for the moment he contented himself with the free importation of grain and its free circulation at home, without sanctioning its exportation abroad. Apart from changes thus organically affecting the industry of the country, Turgot dealt sternly with certain corruptions that had crept into the system of tax-farming, as well as with the monstrous abuses of the system of court-pensions.

The measures we have enumerated were all excellent in themselves, and the state of the kingdom was such as urgently to call for them. They were steps towards the construction of a fabric of freedom and justice. But they provoked a host of bitter and irreconcilable enemies, while they raised up no corresponding host of energetic supporters. The reason of the first of these circumstances is plain enough, but the second demands a moment's consideration. That the country clergy should denounce the Philosopher, as they called him, from the pulpit and the steps of the altar, was natural enough. Many even of his old colleagues of the Encyclopædia had joined Necker against the minister. The greatest of them all, it is true, stood by Turgot with unfailing staunchness; a shower of odes, diatribes, dialogues, allegories, dissertations, came from

the Patriarch of Ferney to confound and scatter the enemies of the new reforms. But the people were unmoved. If Turgot published an explanation of the high price of grain, they perversely took explanation for gratulation, and thought the Controller preferred to have bread dear. If he put down seditious risings with a strong hand, they insisted that he was in nefarious league with the corn-merchants and the bakers. How was it that the people did not recognize the hand of a benefactor? The answer is that they suspected the source of the new reforms too virulently to judge them calmly. For half a century, as Condorcet says pregnantly, they had been undergoing the evils of anarchy, while they supposed that they were feeling those of despotism. The error was grave, but it was natural, and one effect of it was to make every measure that proceeded from the court odious. Hence, when the parlements took up their judicial arms in defence of abuses and against reforms, the common people took sides with them, for no better reason than that this was to take sides against the king's government. Malesherbes in those days, and good writers since, held that the only safe plan was to convoke the States General. They would at least have shared the responsibility with the crown. Turgot rejected this opinion. By doctrine, no less than by temperament, he disliked the control of a government by popular bodies. Everything for the people, nothing by the people: this was the maxim of the Economists, and Turgot held it in all its rigour. The royal authority was the only instrument that he could bring himself to use. Even if he could have counted on a Frederick or a Napoleon, the instrument would hardly have served his purposes; as things were, it was a broken reed, not a fine sword, that he had to his hand.

The National Assembly and the Convention went to work

exactly in the same stiff and absolute spirit as Turgot. They were just as little disposed to gradual, moderate, and compromising ways as he. But with them the absolute authority on which they leaned was real and most potent; with him it was a shadow. We owe it to Turgot that the experiment was complete: he proved that the monarchy of divine right was incapable of reform.[1] As it has been sententiously expressed, 'The part of the sages was now played out; room was now for the men of destiny.'

If the repudiation of a popular assembly was the cardinal error in Turgot's scheme of policy, there were other errors added. The publication of Boncerf's attack on the feudal dues, with the undisguised sanction of the minister, has been justly condemned as a grave imprudence, and as involving a forgetfulness of the true principles of government and administration, that would certainly not have been committed either by Colbert, in whom Turgot professed to seek his model, nor by Gournai, who had been his master. It was a broad promise of reforms which Turgot was by no means sure of being able to persuade the king and his council to adopt. By prematurely divulging his projects, it augmented the number of his adversaries, without being definite enough to bring new friends.[2] Again, Turgot did nothing to redeem it by personal conciliatoriness in carrying out the designs of a benevolent absolutism. The Count of Provence, afterwards Lewis XVIII., wrote a satire on the government during Turgot's ministry, and in it there is a picture of the great reformer as he appeared to his enemies: 'There was then in France an awkward, heavy, clumsy creature; born with more rudeness than character, more obstinacy than firmness, more impetuosity than tact; a charlatan

[1] Foncin's *Ministère de Turgot*, p. 574.

[2] See Mauguin's *Etudes Historiques sur l'Administration de l'Agriculture*, i. 353.

in administration no less than in virtue, exactly formed to get the one decried and to disgust the world with the other; made harsh and distant by his self-love, and timid by his pride; as much a stranger to men, whom he had never known, as to the public weal, which he had never seen aright; this man was called Turgot.'

It is a mistake to take the word of political adversaries for a man's character, but adversaries sometimes only say out aloud what is already suspected by friends. The coarse account given by the Count of Provence shows us where Turgot's weakness as a ruler may have lain. He was distant and stiff in manner, and encouraged no one to approach him. Even his health went against him, for at a critical time in his short ministry he was confined to bed by gout for four months, and he could see nobody save clerks and secretaries. The very austerity, loftiness, and purity, which make him so reverend and inspiring a figure in the pages of the noble-hearted Condorcet, may well have been impediments in dealing with a society that, in the fatal words of the Roman historian, could bear neither its disorders nor their remedies.

The king had once said pathetically: 'It is only M. Turgot and I who love the people.' But even with the king, there were points at which the minister's philosophic severity strained their concord. Turgot was the friend of Voltaire and Condorcet; he counted Christianity a form of superstition; and he, who as a youth had refused to go through life wearing the mask of the infidel abbé, had too much self-respect in his manhood to practise the rites and uses of a system which he considered a degradation of the understanding. One day the king said to Maurepas: 'You have given me a Controller-general who never goes to mass.' 'Sire,' replied that ready worldling, 'the Abbé Terray always went'—and Terray had

brought the government to bankruptcy. But Turgot hurt the king's conscience more directly than by staying away from mass and confession. Faithful to the long tradition of his ancestors, Lewis XVI. wished the ceremony of his coronation to take place at Rheims. Turgot urged that it should be performed at Paris, and as cheaply as possible. And he advanced on to still more delicate ground. In the rite of consecration, the usage was that the king should take an oath to pursue all heretics. Turgot demanded the suppression of this declaration of intolerance. It was pointed out to him that it was only a formality. But Turgot was one of those severe and scrupulous souls, to whom a wicked promise does not cease to be degrading by becoming hypocritical. And he was perfectly justified. It was only by the gradual extinction of the vestiges of her ancient barbarisms, as occasion offered, that the Church could have escaped the crash of the Revolution. Meanwhile, the king and the priests had their own way: the king was crowned at Rheims, and the priests exacted from him an oath to be unjust, oppressive, and cruel towards a portion of his subjects. Turgot could only remonstrate; but the philosophic memorial in which he protested in favour of religious freedom and equality, gave the king a serious shock.

We have no space, nor would it be worth while, to describe the intrigues which ended in the minister's fall. Already in this volume, we have referred to the immediate and decisive share which the queen had in his disgrace.[1] He was dismissed in the beginning of May, 1776, having been in power little more than twenty months. 'You are too hurried,' Malesherbes had said to him. 'You think you have the love of the public good; not at all; you have a rage for it, for a man must be nothing

[1] See above, p. 51.

short of enraged to insist on forcing the hand of the whole world.' Turgot replied, more pathetically perhaps than reasonably, 'What, you accuse me of haste, and you know that in my family we die of gout at fifty!'

There is something almost tragic in the joy with which Turgot's dismissal was received on all sides. 'I seem,' said Marmontel, 'to be looking at a band of brigands in the forest of Bondy, who have just heard that the provost-marshal has been discharged.' Voltaire and Condorcet were not more dismayed by the fall of the minister, than by the insensate delight which greeted the catastrophe. 'This event,' wrote Condorcet, 'has changed all nature in my eyes. I have no longer the same pleasure in looking at those fair landscapes over which he would have shed happiness and contentment. The sight of the gaiety of the people wrings my heart. They dance and sport, as if they had lost nothing. Ah, we have had a delicious dream, but it has been all too short.' Voltaire was equally inconsolable, and still more violent in the expression of his grief. When he had become somewhat calmer, he composed those admirable verses,—*To a Man:*

'Philosophe indulgent, ministre citoyen,
Qui ne cherchas le vrai que pour faire le bien,
Qui d'un peuple léger et trop ingrat peut-être
Préparais le bonheur et celui de son maître,
Ce qu'on nomme disgrace a payé tes bienfaits.
Le vrai prix de travail n'est que de vivre en paix.'

Turgot at first showed some just and natural resentment at the levity with which he had been banished from power, and he put on no airs of theatrical philosophy. He would have been untrue to the sincerity of his character, if he had affected indifference or satisfaction at seeing his beneficent hopes for ever destroyed. But chagrin did not numb his industry or his wide interests. Condorcet went to visit him some months after

his fall. He describes Turgot as reading Ariosto, as making experiments in physics, and as having forgotten all that had passed within the last two years, save when the sight of evils that he would have mitigated or removed, happened to remind him of it. He occupied himself busily with chemistry and optics, with astronomy and mechanics, and above all with meteorology, which was a new science in those days, and the value of which to the study of the conditions of human health, of the productions of the earth, of navigation, excited his most ardent anticipations. Turgot also was so moved by the necessity for a new synthesis of life and knowledge as to frame a plan for a great work 'on the human soul, the order of the universe, the Supreme Being, the principles of societies, the rights of men, political constitutions, legislation, administration, physical education, the means of perfecting the human race relatively to the progressive advance and employment of their forces, to the happiness of which they are susceptible, to the extent of the knowledge to which they may attain, to the certainty, clearness, and simplicity of the principles of conduct, to the purity of the feelings that spring up in men's souls.' While his mind was moving through these immense spaces of thought, he did not forget the things of the hour. He invented a machine for serving ship's cables. He wrote a plea for allowing Captain Cook's vessel to remain unmolested during the American war. With Adam Smith, with Dr. Price, with Franklin, with Hume, he kept up a grave and worthy correspondence. Of his own countrymen, Condorcet was his most faithful friend and disciple, and it is much to Condorcet's credit that this was so, for Turgot never gave way to the passionate impulses of the philosophic school against what Voltaire called the Infamous, that is to say, against the Church, her doctrines, her morality, her history.

We have already said that the keyword to Turgot's political aims and social theory was not Pity nor Benevolence, but Justice. It was Justice also, not temporary Prejudice nor Passion, that guided his judgment through the heated issues of the time. This justice and exact reasonableness it was impossible to surprise or throw off its guard. His sublime intellectual probity never suffered itself to be tempted. He protested against the doctrines of Helvétius's book, *de l'Esprit*, and of d'Holbach's *Système de la Nature*, at a moment when some of his best friends were enthusiastic in admiration, for no better reason than that the doctrines of the two books were hateful to the ecclesiastics and destructive of the teaching of the Church. In the course of a discussion, Condorcet had maintained that in general scrupulous persons are not fit for great things: a Christian, he said, will waste in subduing the darts of the flesh time that he might have employed upon things that would have been useful to humanity; he will never venture to rise against tyrants, for fear of having formed a hasty judgment, and so forth in other cases. 'No virtue,' replies Turgot, 'in whatever sense you take the word, can dispense with justice; and I think no better of the people who do your *great things* at the cost of justice, than I do of poets who fancy that they can produce great wonders of imagination without order and regularity. I know that excessive precision tends to deaden the fire alike of action and of composition; but there is a medium in everything. There has never been any question in our controversy of a capuchin wasting his time in quenching the darts of the flesh, though, by the way, in the whole sum of time wasted, the term expressing the time lost in satisfying the appetites of the flesh would probably be found to be decidedly the greater of the two.' This parenthesis is one of a hundred illustrations of Turgot's habitual refusal to

be carried out of the narrow path of exact rationality, or to take for granted a single word of the common form of the dialect even of his best friends and closest associates. And the readiness with which men fall into common form, the levity with which they settle the most complex and difficult issues, stirred in Turgot what Michelet calls *férocité*, and Mr. Matthew Arnold calls *sæva indignatio*. 'Turgot was filled with an astonished, awful, oppressive sense of the *immoral thoughtlessness* of men; of the heedless, hazardous way in which they deal with things of the greatest moment to them; of the immense, incalculable misery which is due to this cause.' (*M. Arnold.*)

Turgot died on the 20th of March, 1781, leaving to posterity the memory of a character which was more perfect and imposing than his performances. Condorcet saw in this harmonious union and fine balance of qualities the secret of his unpopularity. 'Envy,' he says, 'seems more closely to attend a character that approaches perfection, than one that, while astonishing men by its greatness, yet by exhibiting a mixture of defects and vices, offers a consolation that envy seeks.'

THE DEATH OF MR. MILL.

THE DEATH OF MR. MILL.

(*May*, 1873.)

THE tragic commonplaces of the grave sound a fuller note as we mourn for one of the greater among the servants of humanity. A strong and pure light is gone out, the radiance of a clear vision and a beneficent purpose. One of those high and most worthy spirits who arise from time to time to stir their generation with new mental impulses in the deeper things, has perished from among us. The death of one who did so much to impress on his contemporaries that physical law works independently of moral law, marks with profounder emphasis the ever ancient and ever fresh decree that there is one end to the just and the unjust, and that the same strait tomb awaits alike the poor dead whom nature or circumstance imprisoned in mean horizons, and those who saw far and felt passionately and put their reason to noble uses. Yet the fulness of our grief is softened by a certain greatness and solemnity in the event. The teachers of men are so few, the gift of intellectual fatherhood is so rare, it is surrounded by such singular gloriousness. The loss of a powerful and generous statesman, or of a great master in letters or art, touches us with many a vivid regret. The Teacher, the man who has talents and has virtues, and yet has a further something which is neither talent nor virtue, and which gives him the mysterious secret of drawing men after him, leaves a deeper sense of emptiness than this; but lamentation is at once soothed and

elevated by a sense of sacredness in the occasion. Even those whom Mr. Mill honoured with his friendship, and who must always bear to his memory the affectionate veneration of sons, may yet feel their pain at the thought that they will see him no more, raised into a higher mood as they meditate on the loftiness of his task and the steadfastness and success with which he achieved it. If it is grievous to think that such richness of culture, such full maturity of wisdom, such passion for truth and justice, are now by a single stroke extinguished, at least we may find some not unworthy solace in the thought of the splendid purpose that they have served in keeping alive, and surrounding with new attractions, the difficult tradition of patient and accurate thinking in union with unselfish and magnanimous living.

Much will one day have to be said as to the precise value of Mr. Mill's philosophical principles, the more or less of his triumphs as a dialectician, his skill as a critic and an expositor. However this trial may go, we shall at any rate be sure that with his reputation will stand or fall the intellectual repute of a whole generation of his countrymen. The most eminent of those who are now so fast becoming the front line, as death mows down the veterans, all bear traces of his influence, whether they are avowed disciples or avowed opponents. If they did not accept his method of thinking, at least he determined the questions which they should think about. For twenty years no one at all open to serious intellectual impressions has left Oxford without having undergone the influence of Mr. Mill's teaching, though it would be too much to say that in that grey temple where they are ever burnishing new idols, his throne is still unshaken. The professorial chairs there and elsewhere are more and more being filled with men

whose minds have been trained in his principles. The universities only typify his influence on the less learned part of the world. The better sort of journalists educated themselves on his books, and even the baser sort acquired a habit of quoting from them. He is the only writer in the world whose treatises on highly abstract subjects have been printed during his lifetime in editions for the people, and sold at the price of railway novels. Foreigners from all countries read his books as attentively as his most eager English disciples, and sought his opinion as to their own questions with as much reverence as if he had been a native oracle. An eminent American who came over on an official mission which brought him into contact with most of the leading statesmen throughout Europe, said to the present writer:—'The man who impressed me most of them all was Stuart Mill; you placed before him the facts on which you sought his opinion. He took them, gave you the different ways in which they might fairly be looked at, balanced the opposing considerations, and then handed you a final judgment in which nothing was left out. His mind worked like a splendid piece of machinery; you supply it with raw material, and it turns you out a perfectly finished product.' Of such a man England has good reason to be very proud.

He was stamped in many respects with specially English quality. He is the latest chief of a distinctively English school of philosophy, in which, as has been said, the names of Locke, Hume, Adam Smith, and Bentham (and Mr. Mill would have added James Mill) mark the line of succession—the school whose method subordinates imagination to observation, and whose doctrine lays the foundations of knowledge in experience, and the tests of conduct in utility. Yet, for all this, one of his most remarkable characteristics was less English than French;

his constant admission of an ideal and imaginative element in social speculation, and a glowing persuasion that the effort and wisdom and ingenuity of men are capable, if free opportunity be given by social arrangements, of raising human destiny to a pitch that is at present beyond our powers of conception. Perhaps the sum of all his distinction lies in this union of stern science with infinite aspiration, of rigorous sense of what is real and practicable with bright and luminous hope. He told one who was speaking of Condorcet's Life of Turgot, that in his younger days whenever he was inclined to be discouraged, he was in the habit of turning to this book, and that he never did so without recovering possession of himself. To the same friend, who had printed something comparing Mr. Mill's repulse at Westminster with the dismissal of the great minister of Lewis the Sixteenth, he wrote:—'I never received so gratifying a compliment as the comparison of me to Turgot; it is indeed an honour to me that such an assimilation should have occurred to you.' Those who have studied the character of one whom even the rigid Austin thought worthy to be called 'the godlike Turgot,' know both the nobleness and the rarity of this type.

Its force lies not in single elements, but in that combination of an ardent interest in human improvement with a reasoned attention to the law of its conditions, which alone deserves to be honoured with the high name of wisdom. This completeness was one of the secrets of Mr. Mill's peculiar attraction for young men, and for the comparatively few women whose intellectual interest was strong enough to draw them to his books. He satisfied the ingenuous moral ardour which is instinctive in the best natures, until the dust of daily life dulls or extinguishes it, and at the same time he satisfied the rationalistic qualities, which are not less marked in the youthful temperament of those who by-and-by do the work of the world. This mixture

of intellectual gravity with a passionate love of improvement in all the aims and instruments of life, made many intelligences alive, who would otherwise have slumbered, or sunk either into a dry pedantry on the one hand, or a windy, mischievous philanthropy on the other. He showed himself so wholly free from the vulgarity of the sage. He could hope for the future, without taking his eye from the realities of the present. He recognised the social destination of knowledge, and kept the elevation of the great art of social existence ever before him, as the ultimate end of all speculative activity.

Another side of this rare combination was his union of courage with patience, of firm non-conformity with silent conformity. Compliance is always a question of degree, depending on time, circumstance, and subject. Mr. Mill hit the exact mean, equally distant from timorous caution and self-indulgent violence. He was unrivalled in the difficult art of conciliating as much support as was possible and alienating as little sympathy as possible, for novel and extremely unpopular opinions. He was not one of those who strive to spread new faiths by brilliant swordplay with buttoned foils, and he was not one of those who run amuck among the idols of the tribe and the market-place and the theatre. He knew how to kindle the energy of all who were likely to be persuaded by his reasoning, without stimulating in a corresponding degree the energy of persons whose convictions he attacked. Thus he husbanded the strength of truth, and avoided wasteful friction. Probably no English writer that ever lived has done so much as Mr. Mill to cut at the very root of the theological spirit, yet there is only one passage in the writings published during his lifetime —I mean a well-known passage in the Liberty—which could give any offence to the most devout person. His conformity, one need hardly say, never went beyond the negative degree,

nor ever passed beyond the conformity of silence. That guilty and grievously common pusillanimity which leads men to make or act hypocritical professions, always moved his deepest abhorrence. And he did not fear publicly to testify his interest in the return of an atheist to parliament.

His courage was not of the spurious kinds arising from anger, or ignorance of the peril, or levity, or a reckless confidence. These are all very easy. His distinction was that he knew all the danger to himself, was anxious to save pain to others, was buoyed up by no rash hope that the world was to be permanently bettered at a stroke, and yet for all this he knew how to present an undaunted front to a majority. The only fear he ever knew was fear lest a premature or excessive utterance should harm a good cause. He had measured the prejudices of men, and his desire to arouse this obstructive force in the least degree compatible with effective advocacy of any improvement, set the single limit to his intrepidity. Prejudices were to him like physical predispositions, with which you have to make your account. He knew, too, that they are often bound up with the most valuable elements in character and life, and hence he feared that violent surgery which in eradicating a false opinion fatally bruises at the same time a true and wholesome feeling that may cling to it. The patience which with some men is an instinct, and with others a fair name for indifference, was with him an acquisition of reason and conscience.

The value of this wise and virtuous mixture of boldness with tolerance, of courageous speech with courageous reserve, has been enormous. Along with his direct pleas for freedom of thought and freedom of speech, it has been the chief source of that liberty of expressing unpopular opinions in this country without social persecution, which is now so nearly complete,

that he himself was at last astonished by it. The manner of his dialectic, firm and vigorous as the dialectic was in matter, has gradually introduced mitigating elements into the atmosphere of opinion. Partly, no doubt, the singular tolerance of free discussion which now prevails in England—I do not mean that it is at all perfect—arises from the prevalent scepticism, from indifference, and from the influence of some of the more highminded of the clergy. But Mr. Mill's steadfast abstinence from drawing wholesale indictments against persons or classes whose opinions he controverted, his generous candour, his scrupulous respect for any germ of good in whatever company it was found, and his large allowances, contributed positive elements to what might otherwise have been the negative tolerance that comes of moral stagnation. Tolerance of distasteful notions in others became associated in his person at once with the widest enlightenment, and the strongest conviction of the truth of our own notions.

His career, besides all else, was a protest of the simplest and loftiest kind against some of the most degrading features of our society. No one is more alive than he was to the worth of all that adds grace and dignity to human life; but the sincerity of this feeling filled him with aversion for the make-believe dignity of a luxurious and artificial community. Without either arrogance or bitterness, he stood aloof from that conventional intercourse which is misnamed social duty. Without either discourtesy or cynicism, he refused to play a part in that dance of mimes which passes for life among the upper classes. In him, to extraordinary intellectual attainments was added the gift of a firm and steadfast self-respect, which unfortunately does not always go with them. He felt the reality of things, and it was easier for a workman than for a princess to obtain

access to him. It is not always the men who talk most affectingly about our being all of one flesh and blood, who are proof against those mysterious charms of superior rank, which do so much to foster unworthy conceptions of life in English society; and there are many people capable of accepting Mr. Mill's social principles, and the theoretical corollaries they contain, who yet would condemn his manly plainness and austere consistency in acting on them. The too common tendency in us all to moral slovenliness, and a lazy contentment with a little flaccid protest against evil, finds a constant rebuke in his career. The indomitable passion for justice which made him strive so long and so tenaciously to bring to judgment a public official, whom he conceived to be a great criminal, was worthy of one of the stoutest patriots in our seventeenth-century history. The same moral thoroughness stirred the same indignation in him on a more recent occasion, when he declared it 'a permanent disgrace to the Government that the iniquitous sentence on the gas-stokers was not remitted as soon as passed.'

Much of his most striking quality was owing to the exceptional degree in which he was alive to the constant tendency of society to lose some excellence of aim, to relapse at some point from the standard of truth and right which had been reached by long previous effort, to fall back in height of moral ideal. He was keenly sensible that it is only by persistent striving after improvement in our conceptions of duty, and improvement in the external means for realising them, that even the acquisitions of past generations are retained. He knew the intense difficulty of making life better by ever so little. Hence at once the exaltation of his own ideas of truth and right, and his eagerness to conciliate anything like

virtuous social feeling, in whatever intellectual or political association he found it. Hence also the vehemence of his passion for the unfettered and unchecked development of new ideas on all subjects, of originality in moral and social points of view; because repression, whether by public opinion or in any other way, may be the means of untold waste of gifts that might have conferred on mankind unspeakable benefits. The discipline and vigour of his understanding made him the least indulgent of judges to anything like charlatanry, and effectually prevented his unwillingness to let the smallest good element be lost, from degenerating into that weak kind of universalism which nullifies some otherwise good men.

Some great men seize upon us by the force of an imposing and majestic authority; their thoughts impress the imagination, their words are winged, they are as prophets bearing high testimony that cannot be gainsaid. Bossuet, for instance, or Pascal. Others, and of these Mr. Mill was one, acquire disciples not by a commanding authority, but by a moderate and impersonal kind of persuasion. He appeals not to our sense of greatness and power in a teacher, which is noble, but to our love of finding and embracing truth for ourselves, which is still nobler. People who like their teacher to be as a king publishing decrees with herald and trumpet, perhaps find Mr. Mill colourless. Yet this habitual effacement of his own personality marked a delicate and very rare shade in his reverence for the sacred purity of truth.

Meditation on the influence of one who has been the foremost instructor of his time in wisdom and goodness quickly breaks off, in this hour when his loss is fresh upon us; it changes into affectionate reminiscences for which silence is

more fitting. In such an hour thought turns rather to the person, than the work, of the master whom we mourn. We recall his simplicity, gentleness, heroic self-abnegation; his generosity in encouraging, his eager readiness in helping; the warm kindliness of his accost, the friendly brightening of the eye. The last time I saw him was a few days before he left England.[1] He came to spend a day with me in the country, of which the following brief notes happened to be written at the time in a letter to a friend:—

'He came down by the morning train to Guildford station, where I was waiting for him. He was in his most even and mellow humour. We walked in a leisurely way and through roundabout tracks for some four hours along the ancient green road which you know, over the high grassy downs, into old chalk pits picturesque with juniper and yew, across heaths and commons, and so up to our windy promontory, where the majestic prospect stirred him with lively delight. You know he is a fervent botanist, and every ten minutes he stooped to look at this or that on the path. Unluckily I am ignorant of the very rudiments of the matter, so his parenthetic enthusiasms were lost upon me.

'Of course he talked, and talked well. He admitted that Goethe had added new points of view to life, but has a deep dislike of his moral character; wondered how a man who could draw the sorrows of a deserted woman like Aurelia, in *Wilhelm Meister*, should yet have behaved so systematically ill to women. Goethe tried as hard as he could to be a Greek, yet his failure to produce anything perfect in form, except a few lyrics, proves the irresistible expansion of the modern spirit, and the inadequateness of the Greek type to modern needs of activity and expression. Greatly prefers Schiller in all respects; turning to him from Goethe is like going into the fresh air from a hot-house.

'Spoke of style; thinks Goldsmith unsurpassed; then Addison

[1] April 5, 1873.

comes. Greatly dislikes the style of Junius and of Gibbon; indeed, thinks meanly of the latter in all respects, except for his research, which alone of the work of that century stands the test of nineteenth-century criticism. Did not agree with me that George Sand's is the high-water mark of prose, but yet could not name anybody higher, and admitted that her prose stirs you like music.

'Seemed disposed to think that the most feasible solution of the Irish University question is a Catholic University, the restrictive and obscurantist tendencies of which you may expect to have checked by the active competition of life with men trained in more enlightened systems. Spoke of Home Rule.

'Made remarks on the difference in the feeling of modern refusers of Christianity as compared with that of men like his father, impassioned deniers, who believed that if only you broke up the power of the priests and checked superstition, all would go well —a dream from which they were partially awakened by seeing that the French revolution, which overthrew the Church, still did not bring the millennium. His radical friends used to be very angry with him for loving Wordsworth. "Wordsworth," I used to say, "is against you, no doubt, in the battle which you are now waging, but after you have won, the world will need more than ever those qualities which Wordsworth is keeping alive and nourishing." In his youth mere negation of religion was a firm bond of union, social and otherwise, between men who agreed in nothing else.

'Spoke of the modern tendency to pure theism, and met the objection that it retards improvement by turning the minds of some of the best men from social affairs, by the counter-proposition that it is useful to society, apart from the question of its truth,—useful as a provisional belief, because people will identify serviceable ministry to men with service of God. Thinks we cannot with any sort of precision define the coming modification of religion, but anticipates that it will undoubtedly rest upon the solidarity of mankind, as Comte said, and as you and I believe. Perceives two things, at any rate, which are likely to lead men to invest this with the moral authority of a religion; first, they will become more and

more impressed by the awful fact that a piece of conduct to-day may prove a curse to men and women scores and even hundreds of years after the author of it is dead; and second, they will more and more feel that they can only satisfy their sentiment of gratitude to seen or unseen benefactors, can only repay the untold benefits they have inherited, by diligently maintaining the traditions of service.

'And so forth, full of interest and suggestiveness all through. When he got here, he chatted to R—— over our lunch, with something of the simple amiableness of a child, about the wild flowers, the ways of insects, and notes of birds. He was impatient for the song of the nightingale. Then I drove him to our little roadside station, and one of the most delightful days of my life came to its end, like all other days, delightful and sorrowful.'

Alas, the sorrowful day which ever dogs our delight, followed very quickly. The nightingale that he longed for fills the darkness with music, but not for the ear of the dead master: he rests in the deeper darkness where the silence is unbroken for ever. We may console ourselves with the reflection offered by the dying Socrates to his sorrowful companions: he who has arrayed the soul in her own proper jewels of moderation and justice and courage and nobleness and truth, is ever ready for the journey when his time comes. We have lost a great teacher and example of knowledge and virtue, but men will long feel the presence of his character about them, making them ashamed of what is indolent or selfish, and encouraging them to all disinterested labour, both in trying to do good, and in trying to find out what the good is,—which is harder.

MR. MILL'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

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CHERCHER en gémissant—search with many sighs—that was Pascal's notion of praiseworthy living and choosing the better part. Search, and search with much travail, strikes us as the chief intellectual ensign and device of that eminent man whose record of his own mental nurture and growth we have all been reading. Everybody endowed with energetic intelligence has a measure of the spirit of search poured out upon him. All such persons act on the Socratic maxim that the life without inquiry is a life to be lived by no man. But it is the rare distinction of a very few to accept the maxim in its full significance, to insist on an open mind as the true secret of wisdom, to press the examination and testing of our convictions as the true way at once to stability and growth of character, and thus to make of life what it is so good for us that it should be, a continual building up, a ceaseless fortifying and enlargement and multiplication of the treasures of the spirit. To make a point of 'examining what was said in defence of all opinions, however new or however old, in the conviction that even if they were errors there might be a substratum of truth underneath them, and that in any case the discovery of what it was that made them plausible would be a benefit to truth,'[1]—to thrust out the spirit of party, of sect, of creed, of the poorer sort of self-esteem, of futile contentiousness, and so to seek and again seek with undeviating

[1] Mill's *Autobiography*, 242.

singleness of mind the right interpretation of our experiences —here is the genuine seal of intellectual mastery and the true stamp of a perfect rationality.

The men to whom this is the ideal of the life of the reason, and who have done anything considerable towards spreading a desire after it, deserve to have their memories gratefully cherished even by those who do not agree with all their positive opinions. We need only to reflect a little on the conditions of human existence; on the urgent demand which material necessities inevitably make on so immense a proportion of our time and thought; on the space which is naturally filled up by the activity of absorbing affections; on the fatal power of mere tradition and report over the indifferent, and the fatal power of inveterate prejudice over so many even of the best of those who are not indifferent. Then we shall know better how to value such a type of character and life as Mr. Mill has now told us the story of, in which intellectual impressionableness on the most important subjects of human thought was so cultivated as almost to acquire the strength and quick responsiveness of emotional sensibility. And this, without the too common drawback to great openness of mind. This drawback consists in loose beliefs, taken up to-day and silently dropped to-morrow; vacillating opinions, constantly being exchanged for their contraries; feeble convictions, appearing, shifting, vanishing, in the quicksands of an unstable mind.

Nobody will impute any of these disastrous weaknesses to Mr. Mill. His impressionableness was of the valuable positive kind, which adds and assimilates new elements from many quarters, without disturbing the organic structure of the whole. What he says of one stage in his growth remained generally true of him until the very end:—'I found the fabric of my

old and taught opinions giving way in many fresh places, and I never allowed it to fall to pieces, but was incessantly occupied in weaving it anew. I never in the course of my transition was content to remain, for ever so short a time, confused and unsettled. When I had taken in any new idea, I could not rest till I had adjusted its relations to my old opinions, and ascertained exactly how far its effect ought to extend in modifying or superseding them' (p. 156). This careful and conscientious recognition of the duty of having ordered opinions, and of responsibility for these opinions being both as true and as consistent with one another as taking pains with his mind could make them, distinguished Mr. Mill from the men who flit aimlessly from doctrine to doctrine, as the flies of a summer day dart from point to point in the vacuous air. It distinguished him also from those sensitive spirits who fling themselves down from the heights of rationalism suddenly into the pit of an infallible church; and from those who, like La Mennais, move violently between faith and reason, between tradition and inquiry, between the fulness of deference to authority and the fulness of individual self-assertion.

All minds of the first quality move and grow; they have a susceptibility to many sorts of new impressions, a mobility, a feeling outwards, which makes it impossible for them to remain in the stern fixity of an early implanted set of dogmas, whether philosophic or religious. In stoical tenacity of character, as well as in intellectual originality and concentrated force of understanding, some of those who knew both tell us that Mr. Mill was inferior to his father. But who does not feel in the son the serious charm of a power of adaptation and pliableness, which we can never associate with the hardy and more rigorous nature of the other? And it was just because he had this sensibility of the intellect, that the history of what it did for him

is so edifying a performance for a people like ourselves, among whom that quality is so extremely uncommon. For it was the sensibility of strength and not of weakness, nor of mere over-refinement and subtlety. We may estimate the significance of such a difference, when we think how little, after all, the singular gifts of a Newman or a Maurice have done for their contemporaries, simply because these two eminent men allowed consciousness of their own weakness to 'sickly over' the spontaneous impulses of their strength.

The wonder is that the reaction against such an education as that through which James Mill brought his son,—an education so intense, so purely analytical, doing so much for the reason and so little for the satisfaction of the affections,—was not of the most violent kind. The wonder is that the crisis through which nearly every youth of good quality has to pass, and from which Mr. Mill, as he has told us, by no means escaped, did not land him in some of the extreme forms of transcendentalism. If it had done so, the record of the journey would no doubt have been more abundant in melodramatic incidents. It would have done more to tickle the fancy of 'the present age of loud disputes but weak convictions.' And it might have been found more touching by the large numbers of talkers and writers who seem to think that a history of a careful man's opinions on grave and difficult subjects ought to have all the rapid movements and unexpected turns of a romance, and that a book without rapture and effusion and a great many capital letters must be joyless and disappointing. Those of us who dislike literary hysteria as much as we dislike the coarseness that mistakes itself for force, may well be glad to follow the mental history of a man who knew how to move and grow without any of these reactions and leaps on the one hand, or any of that overdone realism on the other, which may all make

a more striking picture, but which do assuredly more often than not mark the ruin of a mind and the nullification of a career.

If we are now and then conscious in the book of a certain want of spacing, of changing perspectives and long vistas; if we have perhaps a sense of being too narrowly enclosed; if we miss the relish of humour or the occasional relief of irony; we ought to remember that we are busy not with a work of imagination or art, but with the practical record of the formation of an eminent thinker's mental habits and the succession of his mental attitudes. The formation of such mental habits is not a romance, but the most arduous of real concerns. If we are led up to none of the enkindled summits of the soul, and plunged into none of its abysses, that is no reason why we should fail to be struck by the pale flame of strenuous self-possession, or touched by the ingenuousness and simplicity of the speaker's accents. A generation continually excited by narratives, as sterile as vehement, of storm and stress and spiritual shipwreck, might do well, if it knew the things that pertained to its peace, to ponder this unvarnished history—the history of a man who, though he was not one of the picturesque victims of the wasteful torments of an uneasy spiritual self-consciousness, yet laboured so patiently after the gifts of intellectual strength, and did so much permanently to widen the judgments of the world.

If Mr. Mill's Autobiography has no literary grandeur, nor artistic variety, it has the rarer merit of presenting for our contemplation a character that was infested by none of the smaller passions, and warped by none of the more unintelligent attitudes of the human mind. We have to remember that it is exactly these, the smaller passions on the one hand, and slovenliness of intelligence on the other, which are even worse

agencies in spoiling the worth of life and the advance of society, than the more imposing vices either of thought or sentiment. Many have told the tale of a life of much external eventfulness. There is a rarer instructiveness in the quiet career of one whose life was an incessant education, a persistent strengthening of the mental habit of 'never accepting half-solutions of difficulties as complete; never abandoning a puzzle, but again and again returning to it until it was cleared up; never allowing obscure corners of a subject to remain unexplored, because they did not appear important; never thinking that I perfectly understood any part of a subject until I understood the whole' (p. 123). It is true that this mental habit is not so singular in itself, for it is the common and indispensable merit of every truly scientific thinker. Mr. Mill's distinction lay in the deliberate intention and the systematic patience with which he brought it to the consideration of moral and religious and social subjects. In this region hitherto, for reasons that are not difficult to seek, the empire of prejudice and passion has been so much stronger, so much harder to resist, than in the field of physical science.

Sect is so ready to succeed sect, and school comes after school, with constant replacement of one sort of orthodoxy by another sort, until even the principle of relativity becomes the base of a set of absolute and final dogmas, and the very doctrine of uncertainty itself becomes fixed in a kind of authoritative nihilism. It is, therefore, a signal gain that we now have a new type, with the old wise device, *μέμνησο ἀπιστεῖν—be sure that you distrust.* Distrust your own bias; distrust your supposed knowledge; constantly try, prove, fortify your firmest convictions. And all this, throughout the whole domain where the intelligence rules. It was characteristic of a man of this type that he should have been seized by that memorable pas-

sage in Condorcet's Life of Turgot to which Mr. Mill refers (p. 114), and which every man with an active interest in serious affairs should bind about his neck and write on the tablets of his heart.

'Turgot,' says his wise biographer, 'always looked upon anything like a sect as mischievous. . . . From the moment that a sect comes into existence, all the individuals composing it become answerable for the faults and errors of each one of them. The obligation to remain united leads them to suppress or dissemble all truths that might wound anybody whose adhesion is useful to the sect. They are forced to establish in some form a body of doctrine, and the opinions which make a part of it, being adopted without inquiry, become in due time pure prejudices. Friendship stops with the individuals; but the hatred and envy that any of them may arouse extends to the whole sect. If this sect be formed by the most enlightened men of the nation, if the defence of truths of the greatest importance to the common happiness be the object of its zeal, the mischief is still worse. Everything true or useful which they propose is rejected without examination. Abuses and errors of every kind always have for their defenders that herd of presumptuous and mediocre mortals, who are the bitterest enemies of all celebrity and renown. Scarcely is a truth made clear, before those to whom it would be prejudicial crush it under the name of a sect that is sure to have already become odious, and are certain to keep it from obtaining so much as a hearing. Turgot, then, was persuaded that perhaps the greatest ill you can do to truth is to drive those who love it to form themselves into a sect, and that these in turn can commit no more fatal mistake than to have the vanity or the weakness to fall into the trap.'

Yet we know that with Mr. Mill as with Turgot this deep

distrust of sect was no hindrance to the most careful systematisation of opinion and conduct. He did not interpret manysidedness in the flaccid watery sense which flatters the indolence of so many of our contemporaries, who like to have their ears amused with a new doctrine each morning, to be held for a day, and dropped in the evening, and who have little more seriousness in their intellectual life than the busy insects of a summer noon. He says that he looked forward 'to a future which shall unite the best qualities of the critical with the best qualities of the organic periods; unchecked liberty of thought, unbounded freedom of individual action in all modes not hurtful to others; but also convictions as to what is right and wrong, useful and pernicious, deeply engraven on the feelings by early education and general unanimity of sentiment, and so firmly grounded in reason and the true exigencies of life, that they shall not, like all former and present creeds, religious, ethical, and political, require to be periodically thrown off and replaced by others' (p. 166). This was in some sort the type at which he aimed in the formation of his own character—a type that should combine organic with critical quality, the strength of an ordered set of convictions, with that pliability and that receptiveness in face of new truth, which are indispensable to these very convictions being held intelligently and in their best attainable form. We can understand the force of the eulogy on John Austin (p. 154), that he manifested 'an equal devotion to the two cardinal points of Liberty and Duty.' These are the correlatives in the sphere of action to the two cardinal points of Criticism and Belief in the sphere of thought.

We can in the light of this double way of viewing the right balance of the mind, the better understand the combination of earnestness with tolerance which inconsiderate persons are apt

to find so awkward a stumbling-block in the scheme of philosophic liberalism. Many people in our time have so ill understood the doctrine of liberty, that in some of the most active circles in society they now count you a bigot if you hold any proposition to be decidedly and unmistakably more true than any other. They pronounce you intemperate if you show anger and stern disappointment because men follow the wrong course instead of the right one. Mr. Mill's explanation of the vehemence and decision of his father's disapproval, when he did disapprove, and his refusal to allow honesty of purpose in the doer to soften his disapprobation of the deed, gives the reader a worthy and masculine notion of true tolerance. James Mill's 'aversion to many intellectual errors, or what he regarded as such, partook in a certain sense of the character of a moral feeling. . . . None but those who do not care about opinions will confound this with intolerance. Those, who having opinions which they hold to be immensely important, and their contraries to be prodigiously hurtful, have any deep regard for the general good, will necessarily dislike as a class and in the abstract, those who think wrong what they think right, and right what they think wrong: though they need not be, nor was my father, insensible to good qualities in an opponent, nor governed in their estimation of individuals by one general presumption, instead of by the whole of their character.' I grant that an earnest person, being no more infallible than other men, is liable to dislike people on account of opinions which do not merit dislike; but if he neither himself does them any ill office, nor connives at its being done by others, he is not intolerant: and the forbearance which flows from a conscientious sense of the importance to mankind of the equal freedom of all opinions is the only tolerance which is commendable, or to the highest moral order of minds, possible

(p. 51). This is another side of the co-ordination of Criticism and Belief, of Liberty and Duty, which attained in Mr. Mill himself a completeness that other men, less favoured in education and with less active power of self-control, are not likely to reach, but to reach it ought to be one of the prime objects of their mental discipline. The inculcation of this peculiar morality of the intelligence is one of the most urgently needed processes of our time. For the circumstance of our being in the very depths of a period of transition from one spiritual basis of thought to another, leads men not only to be content with holding a quantity of vague, confused, and contradictory opinions, but also to invest with the honourable name of candour a weak reluctance to hold any one of them earnestly.

Mr. Mill experienced in the four or five last years of his life the disadvantage of trying to unite fairness towards the opinions from which he differed, with loyalty to the positive opinions which he accepted. 'As I had showed in my political writings,' he says, 'that I was aware of the weak points in democratic opinions, some Conservatives, it seems, had not been without hopes of finding me an opponent of democracy: as I was able to see the Conservative side of the question, they presumed that like them I could not see any other side. Yet if they had really read my writings, they would have known that after giving full weight to all that appeared to me well grounded in the arguments against democracy, I unhesitatingly decided in its favour, while recommending that it should be accompanied by such institutions as were consistent with its principle and calculated to ward off its inconveniences' (p. 309). This was only one illustration of what constantly happened, until at length, it is hardly too much to say, a man who had hitherto enjoyed a singular measure of general reverence because he was supposed to see truth in every doctrine,

became downright unpopular among many classes in the community, because he saw more truth in one doctrine than another, and brought the propositions for whose acceptance he was most in earnest eagerly before the public.

In a similar way the Autobiography shows us the picture of a man uniting profound self-respect with a singular neutrality where his own claims are concerned, a singular self-mastery and justice of mind, in matters where with most men the sense of their own personality is wont to be so exacting and so easily irritated. The history of intellectual eminence is too often a history of immoderate egoism. It has perhaps hardly ever been given to any one who exerted such influence as Mr. Mill did over his contemporaries, to view his own share in it with such discrimination and equity as marks every page of his book, and as used to mark every word of his conversation. Knowing as we all do the last infirmity of even noble minds, and how deep the desire to erect himself Pope and Sir Oracle lies in the spirit of a man with strong convictions, we may value the more highly, as well for its rarity as for its intrinsic worth, Mr. Mill's quality of self-effacement, and his steadfast care to look anywhere rather than in his own personal merits, for the source of any of those excellences which he was never led by false modesty to dissemble.

Many people seem to find the most interesting figure in the book that stoical father, whose austere, energetic, imperious, and relentless character showed the temperament of the Scotch Covenanter of the seventeenth century, inspired by the principles and philosophy of France in the eighteenth. No doubt, for those in search of strong dramatic effects, the lines of this strenuous indomitable nature are full of impressiveness.[1] But

[1] In an interesting volume (*The Minor Works of George Grote, edited by Alexander Bain.* London: Murray), we find Grote confirming Mr. Mill's estimate of

one ought to be able to appreciate the distinction and strength of the father, and yet also be able to see that the distinction of the son's strength was in truth more really impressive still. We encounter a modesty that almost speaks the language of fatalism. Pieces of good fortune that most people would assuredly have either explained as due to their own penetration, or to the recognition of their worth by others, or else would have refrained from dwelling upon, as being no more than events of secondary importance, are by Mr. Mill invariably recognised at their full worth or even above it, and invariably spoken of as fortunate accidents, happy turns in the lottery of life, or in some other quiet fatalistic phrase, expressive of his deep feeling how much we owe to influences over which we have no control and for which we have no right to take any credit. His saying that 'it would be a blessing if the doctrine of necessity could be believed by all *quoad* the characters of others, and disbelieved in regard to their own' (p. 169), went even further than that, for he teaches us to accept the doctrine of necessity *quoad* the most marked felicities of life and character, and to lean lightly or not at all upon it in regard to

his father's psychagogic quality. 'His unpremeditated oral exposition,' says Grote of James Mill, 'was hardly less effective than his prepared work with the pen; his colloquial fertility in philosophical subjects, his power of discussing himself, and stimulating others to discuss, his ready responsive inspirations through all the shifts and windings of a sort of Platonic dialogue,—all these accomplishments were to those who knew him, even more impressive than what he composed for the press. Conversation with him was not merely instructive, but provocative to the observant intelligence. Of all persons whom we have known, Mr. James Mill was the one who stood least remote from the lofty Platonic ideal of Dialectic —τοῦ διδόναι καὶ δέχεσθαι λόγον (the giving and receiving of reasons)—competent alike to examine others or to be examined by them in philosophy. When to this we add a strenuous character, earnest convictions, and single-minded devotion to truth, with an utter disdain of mere paradox, it may be conceived that such a man exercised powerful intellectual ascendancy over youthful minds,' etc.—*Minor Works of George Grote*, p. 284.

our demerits. Humility is a rationalistic, no less than a Christian grace—not humility in face of error or arrogant pretensions or selfishness, nor a humility that paralyses energetic effort, but a steadfast consciousness of all the good gifts which our forerunners have made ready for us, and of the weight of our responsibility for transmitting these helpful forces to a new generation, not diminished but augmented.

In more than one remarkable place the Autobiography shows us distinctly what all careful students of Mr. Mill's books supposed, that with him the social aim, the repayment of the services of the past by devotion to the services of present and future, was predominant over any merely speculative curiosity or abstract interest. His preference for deeply reserved ways of expressing even his strongest feelings prevented him from making any expansive show of this governing sentiment. Though no man was ever more free from any taint of that bad habit of us English, of denying or palliating an abuse or a wrong, unless we are prepared with an instant remedy for it, yet he had a strong aversion to mere socialistic declamation. Perhaps, if one may say so without presumption, he was not indulgent enough in this respect. I remember once pressing him with some enthusiasm for Victor Hugo,—an enthusiasm, one is glad to think, which time does nothing to weaken. Mr. Mill, admitting, though not too lavishly, the superb imaginative power of this poetic master of our time, still counted it a fatal drawback to Hugo's worth and claim to recognition that 'he has not brought forward one single practical proposal for the improvement of the society against which he is incessantly thundering.' I ventured to urge that it is unreasonable to ask a poet to draft acts of parliament; and that by bringing all the strength of his imagination and all the

majestic fulness of his sympathy to bear on the social horrors and injustices which still lie so thick about us, he kindled an inextinguishable fire in the hearts of men of weaker initiative and less imperial gifts alike of imagination and sympathy, and so prepared the forces out of which practical proposals and specific improvements may be expected to issue. That so obvious a kind of reflection should not have previously interested Mr. Mill's judgment in favour of the writer of the *Outcasts*, the *Legend of the Ages*, the *Contemplations*, only shows how strong was his dislike to all that savoured of the grandiose, and how afraid he always was of everything that seemed to dissociate emotion from rationally directed effort. That he was himself inspired by this emotion of pity for the common people, of divine rage against the injustice of the strong to the weak, in a degree not inferior to Victor Hugo himself, his whole career most effectually demonstrates.

It is this devotion to the substantial good of the many, though practised without the noisy or ostentatious professions of more egoistic thinkers, which binds together all the parts of his work, from the *System of Logic* down to his last speech on the Land Question. One of the most striking pages in the Autobiography is that in which he gives his reasons for composing the refutation of Hamilton, and as some of these especially valuable passages in the book seem to be running the risk of neglect in favour of those which happen to furnish material for the idle, pitiful gossip of London society, it may be well to reproduce it.

'The difference,' he says, 'between these two schools of philosophy, that of Intuition, and that of Experience and Association, is not a mere matter of abstract speculation; it is full of practical consequences, and lies at the foundation of all the greatest differences of practical opinion in an age of progress.

The practical reformer has continually to demand that changes be made in things which are supported by powerful and widely spread feelings, or to question the apparent necessity and indefeasibleness of established facts; and it is often an indispensable part of his argument to show how those powerful feelings had their origin, and how those facts came to seem necessary and indefeasible. There is therefore a natural hostility between him and a philosophy which discourages the explanation of feelings and moral facts by circumstances and association, and prefers to treat them as ultimate elements of human nature; a philosophy which is addicted to holding up favourite doctrines as intuitive truths, and deems intuition to be the voice of Nature and of God, speaking with an authority higher than that of our reason. In particular, I have long felt that the prevailing tendency to regard all the marked distinctions of human character as innate, and in the main indelible, and to ignore the irresistible proofs that by far the greater part of those differences, whether between individuals, races, or sexes, are such as not only might but naturally would be produced by differences in circumstances, is one of the chief hindrances to the rational treatment of great social questions, and one of the greatest stumbling-blocks to human improvement. This tendency has its source in the intuitional metaphysics which are characterized the reaction of the nineteenth century against the eighteenth, and it is a tendency so agreeable to human indolence, as well as to conservative interests generally, that unless attacked at the very root, it is sure to be carried to even greater length than is really justified by the more moderate views of the intuitional philosophy. . . . Considering then the writings and fame of Sir W. Hamilton as the great fortress of the intuitional philosophy in this country, a fortress the more formidable from the imposing character, and the in many

respects great personal merits and mental endowments of the man, I thought it might be a real service to philosophy to attempt a thorough examination of all his most important doctrines, and an estimate of his general claims to eminence as a philosopher; and I was confirmed in this resolution by observing that in the writings of at least one, and him one of the ablest, of Sir W. Hamilton's followers, his peculiar doctrines were made the justification of a view of religion which I hold to be profoundly immoral—that it is our duty to bow down and worship before a Being whose moral attributes are affirmed to be unknowable by us, and to be perhaps extremely different from those which, when speaking of our fellow-creatures, we call by the same name.' (Pp. 273-5.)

Thus we see that even where the distance between the object of his inquiry and the practical well-being of mankind seemed farthest, still the latter was his starting point, and the doing 'a real service to philosophy' only occurred to him in connection with a still greater and more real service to those social causes for which, and which only, philosophy is worth cultivating. In the *System of Logic* the inspiration had been the same.

'The notion that truths external to the mind,' he writes, 'may be known by intuition or consciousness, independently of observation and experience, is, I am persuaded, in these times, the great intellectual support of false doctrines and bad institutions. By the aid of this theory every inveterate belief and every intense feeling of which the origin is not remembered, is enabled to dispense with the obligation of justifying itself by reason, and is erected into its own all-sufficient voucher and justification. There never was an instrument better devised for consecrating all deep-seated prejudices. And the chief strength of this false philosophy in morals, politics, and religion,

lies in the appeal which it is accustomed to make to the evidence of mathematics and of the cognate branches of physical science. To expel it from these is to drive it from its stronghold. . . . In attempting to clear up the real nature of the evidence of mathematical and physical truth, the *System of Logic* met the intuitive philosophers on ground on which they had previously been deemed unassailable; and gave its own explanation from experience and association of that peculiar character of what are called necessary truths, which is adduced as proof that their evidence must come from a deeper source than experience. Whether this has been done effectually is still *sub judice;* and even then, to deprive a mode of thought so strongly rooted in human prejudices and partialities of its mere speculative support, goes but a very little way towards overcoming it; but though only a step, it is a quite indispensable one; for since, after all, prejudice can only be successfully combated by philosophy, no way can really be made against it permanently, until it has been shown not to have philosophy on its side.' (Pp. 225-7.)

This was to lay the basis of a true positivism by the only means through which it can be laid firmly. It was to establish at the bottom of men's minds the habit of seeking explanations of all phenomena in experience, and building up from the beginning the great positive principle that we can only know phenomena, and can only know them experientially. We see, from such passages as the two that have been quoted, that with Mr. Mill, no less than with Comte, the ultimate object was to bring people to extend positive modes of thinking to the master subjects of morals, politics, and religion. Mr. Mill, however, with a wisdom which Comte unfortunately did not share, refrained from any rash and premature attempt to decide what would be the results of this much-needed extension. He

knew that we were as yet only just coming in sight of the stage where these most complex of all phenomena can be fruitfully studied on positive methods, and he was content with doing as much as he could to expel other methods from men's minds, and to engender the positive spirit and temper. Comte, on the other hand, presumed at once to draw up a minute plan of social reconstruction, which contains some ideas of great beauty and power, some of extreme absurdity, and some which would be very mischievous if there were the smallest chance of their ever being realized. 'His book stands,' Mr. Mill truly says of the *System of Positive Polity*, 'a monumental warning to thinkers on society and politics of what happens when once men lose sight in their speculations of the value of Liberty and Individuality' (p. 213).

It was his own sense of the value of Liberty which led to the production of the little tractate which Mr. Mill himself thought likely to survive longer than anything else that he had written, 'with the possible exception of the *Logic*,' as being 'a kind of philosophic text-book of a single truth, which the changes progressively taking place in modern society tend to bring out into ever stronger relief; the importance to man and society, of a large variety in types of character, and of giving full freedom to human nature to expand itself in innumerable and conflicting directions' (p. 253). It seems to us, however, that Mr. Mill's plea for Liberty in the abstract, invaluable as it is, still is less important than the memorable application of this plea, and of all the arguments supporting it, to that half of the human race whose individuality has hitherto been blindly and most wastefully repressed. The little book on the *Subjection of Women*, though not a capital performance like the *Logic*, was the capital illustration of the modes of

reasoning about human character set forth in his *Logic* applied to the case in which the old metaphysical notion of innate and indelible differences is still nearly as strong as ever it was, and in which its moral and social consequences are so inexpressibly disastrous, so superlatively powerful in keeping the ordinary level of the aims and achievements of life low and meagre. The accurate and unanswerable reasoning no less than the noble elevation of this great argument; the sagacity of a hundred of its maxims on individual conduct and character, no less than the combined rationality and beauty of its aspirations for the improvement of collective social life, make this piece probably the best illustration of all the best and richest qualities of its author's mind, and it is fortunate that a subject of such incomparable importance should have been first effectively presented for discussion in so worthy and pregnant a form.

It is interesting to know definitely from the Autobiography, what is implied in the opening of the book itself, that a zealous belief in the advantages of abolishing the legal and social inequalities of women was not due to the accident of personal intimacy with one or more women of exceptional distinction of character. What has been ignorantly supposed in our own day to be a crotchet of Mr. Mill's was the common doctrine of the younger proselytes of the Benthamite school, and Bentham himself was wholly with them (*Autobiography*, p. 105, and also 244); as, of course, were other thinkers of an earlier date, Condorcet for instance.[1] In this as in other subjects Mr. Mill did not go beyond his modest definition of his own originality —the application of old ideas in new forms and connections (p. 119), or the originality 'which every thoughtful mind

[1] Condorcet's arguments the reader will find in the First Series of these *Critical Miscellanies*, p. 368.

gives to its own mode of conceiving and expressing truths which are common property' (p. 254). Or shall we say that he had an originality of a more genuine kind, which made him first diligently acquire what in an excellent phrase he calls *plenary possession* of truths, and then transfuse them with a sympathetic and contagious enthusiasm?

It is often complained that the book on Women has the radical imperfection of not speaking plainly on the question of the limitations proper to divorce. The present writer once ventured to ask Mr. Mill why he had left this important point undiscussed. Mr. Mill replied that it seemed to him impossible to settle the expediency of more liberal conditions of divorce, 'first, without hearing much more fully than we could possibly do at present the ideas held by women in the matter; second, until the experiment of marriage with entire equality between man and wife had been properly tried.' People who are in a hurry to get rid of their partners may find this very halting kind of work, and a man who wants to take a new wife before sunset, may well be irritated by a philosopher who tells him that the question may possibly be capable of useful discussion towards the middle of the next century. But Mr. Mill's argument is full of force and praiseworthy patience.

The union of boundless patience with unshaken hope was one of Mr. Mill's most conspicuous distinctions. There are two crises in the history of grave and sensitive natures. One on the threshold of manhood, when the youth defines his purpose, his creed, his aspirations; the other towards the later part of middle life, when circumstance has strained his purpose, and tested his creed, and given to his aspirations a cold and practical measure. The second crisis, though less stirring,

less vivid, less coloured to the imagination, is the weightier probation of the two, for it is final and decisive; it marks not the mere unresisted force of youthful impulse and implanted predispositions, as the earlier crisis does, but rather the resisting quality, the strength, the purity, the depth, of the native character, after the many princes of the power of the air have had time and chance of fighting their hardest against it. It is the turn which a man takes about the age of forty or five-and-forty, that parts him off among the sheep on the right hand or the poor goats on the left. This is the time of the grand moral climacteric; when genial unvarnished selfishness, or coarse and ungenial cynicism, or querulous despondency, finally chokes out the generous resolve of a fancied strength which had not yet been tried in the burning fiery furnace of circumstance.

Mr. Mill did not escape the second crisis, any more than he had escaped the first, though he dismisses it in a far more summary manner. The education, he tells us, which his father had given him with such fine solicitude, had taught him to look for the greatest and surest source of happiness in sympathy with the good of mankind on a large scale, and had fitted him to work for this good of mankind in various ways. By the time he was twenty, his sympathies and passive susceptibilities had been so little cultivated, his analytic quality had been developed with so little balance in the shape of developed feelings, that he suddenly found himself unable to take pleasure in those thoughts of virtue and benevolence which had hitherto only been associated with logical demonstration and not with sympathetic sentiment. This dejection was dispelled mainly by the influence of Wordsworth—a poet austere yet gracious, energetic yet sober, penetrated with feeling for nature, yet penetrated with feeling for the homely lot of man. Here was

the emotional synthesis, binding together the energies of the speculative and active mind by sympathetic interest in the common feelings and common destiny of human beings.

For some ten years more (1826-36) Mr. Mill hoped the greatest things for the good of society from reformed institutions. That was the period of parliamentary changes, and such hope was natural and universal. Then a shadow came over this confidence, and Mr. Mill advanced to the position that the choice of political institutions is subordinate to the question, 'what great improvement in life and culture stands next in order for the people concerned, as the condition of their further progress?' (p. 170). In this period he composed the *Logic* (published 1843) and the *Political Economy* (1848). Then he saw what all ardent lovers of improvement are condemned to see, that their hopes have outstripped the rate of progress; that fulfilment of social aspiration is tardy and very slow of foot; and that the leaders of human thought are never permitted to enter into that Promised Land whither they are conducting others. Changes for which he had worked and from which he had expected most, came to pass, but, after they had come to pass, they were 'attended with much less benefit to human well-being than I should formerly have anticipated, because they had produced very little improvement in that which all real amelioration in the lot of mankind depends on, their intellectual and moral state. . . . I had learnt from experience that many false opinions may be exchanged for true ones, without in the least altering the habit of mind of which false opinions are the result' (p. 239). This discovery appears to have brought on no recurrence of the dejection which had clouded a portion of his youth. It only set him to consider the root of so disappointing a conclusion, and led to the conviction that a great change in the fundamental constitution of

men's modes of thought must precede any marked improvement in their lot. He perceived that society is now passing through a transitional period 'of weak convictions, paralysed intellects, and growing laxity of principle,' the consequence of the discredit in the more reflective minds of the old opinions on the cardinal subjects of religion, morals, and politics, which have now lost most of their efficacy for good, though still possessed of life enough to present formidable obstacles to the growth of better opinion on those subjects (p. 239).

Thus the crisis of disappointment which breaks up the hope and effort of so many men who start well, or else throws them into poor and sterile courses, proved in this grave, fervent, and most reasonable spirit only the beginning of more serious endeavours in a new and more arduous vein. Hitherto he had been, as he says, 'more willing to be content with seconding the superficial improvements which had begun to take place in the common opinions of society and the world.' Henceforth he kept less and less in abeyance the more heretical part of his opinions, which he began more and more clearly to discern as 'almost the only ones, the assertion of which tends in any way to regenerate society' (p. 230). The crisis of middle age developed a new fortitude, a more earnest intrepidity, a greater boldness of expression about the deeper things, an interest profounder than ever in the improvement of the human lot. The book on the *Subjection of Women*, the *Liberty*, and probably some pieces that have not yet been given to the world, are the notable result of this ripest, loftiest, and most inspiring part of his life.

This judgment does not appear to be shared by the majority of those who have hitherto published their opinions upon Mr. Mill's life and works. Perhaps it would have been odd if such a judgment had been common. People who think seriously of

life and its conditions either are content with those conditions as they exist, or else they find them empty and deeply unsatisfying. Well, the former class, who naturally figure prominently in the public press, because the press is the more or less flattering mirror of the prevailing doctrines of the day, think that Mr. Mill's views of a better social future are chimerical, utopian, and sentimental. The latter class compensate themselves for the pinchedness of the real world about them by certain rapturous ideals, centring in God, a future life, and the long companionship of the blessed. The consequence of this absorption either in the immediate interests and aims of the hour, or in the interests and aims of an imaginary world which is supposed to await us after death, has been a hasty inclination to look on such a life and such purposes as are set forth in the Autobiography as essentially jejune and dreary. It is not in the least surprising that such a feeling should prevail. If it were otherwise, if the majority of thoughtful men and women were already in a condition to be penetrated by sympathy for the life of 'search with many sighs,' then we should have already gone far on our way towards the goal which a Turgot or a Mill set for human progress. If society had at once recognised the full attractiveness of a life arduously passed in consideration of the means by which the race may take its next step forward in the improvement of character and the amelioration of the common lot,—and this not from love of God nor hope of recompense in a world to come, and still less from hope of recompense or even any very firm assurance of fulfilled aspiration in this world,—then that fundamental renovation of conviction for which Mr. Mill sighed, and that evolution of a new faith to which he had looked forward in the far distance, would already have come to pass.

Mr. Mill has been ungenerously ridiculed for the eagerness

and enthusiasm of his contemplation of a new and better state of human society. Yet we have always been taught to consider it the mark of the loftiest and most spiritual character, for one to be capable of rapturous contemplation of a new and better state in a future life. Why, then, do you not recognise the loftiness and spirituality of those who make their heaven in the thought of the wider light and purer happiness that, in the immensity of the ages, may be brought to new generations of men, by long force of vision and endeavour? What great element is wanting in a life guided by such a hope? Is it not disinterested, and magnanimous, and purifying, and elevating? The countless beauties of association which cluster round the older faith may make the new seem bleak and chilly. But when what is now the old faith was itself new, that too may well have struck, as we know that it did strike, the adherent of the mellowed pagan philosophy as crude, meagre, jejune, dreary.

Then Mr. Mill's life as disclosed to us in these pages has been called joyless, by that sect of religious partisans whose peculiarity is to mistake boisterousness for unction. Was the life of Christ himself, then, so particularly joyful? Can the life of any man be joyful, who sees and feels the tragic miseries and hardly less tragic follies of the earth? The old Preacher, when he considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun, and beheld the tears of such as were oppressed and had no comforter, therefore praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive, and declared him better than both, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun. Those who are willing to trick their understandings and play fast and loose with words may, if they please, console themselves with the fatuous commonplaces of a philosophic optimism. They may, with

eyes tight shut, cling to the notion that they live in the best of all possible worlds, or discerning all the anguish that may be compressed into threescore years and ten, still try to accept the Stoic's paradox that pain is not an evil. Or, most wonderful and most common of all, they may find this joy of which they talk, in meditating on the moral perfections of the omnipotent Being for whose diversion the dismal panorama of all the evil work done under the sun was bidden to unfold itself, and who sees that it is very good. Those who are capable of a continuity of joyous emotion on these terms, may well complain of Mr. Mill's story as dreary; and so may the school of Solomon, who commended mirth because a man hath no better thing than to eat and to drink and to be merry. People, however, who are prohibited by their intellectual conditions from finding full satisfaction either in spiritual raptures or in pleasures of sense, may think the standard of happiness which Mr. Mill sought and reached, not unacceptable and not unworthy of being diligently striven after.

Mr. Mill's conception of happiness in life is more intelligible if we contrast it with his father's. The Cynic element in James Mill, as his son now tells us (p. 48), was that he had scarcely any belief in pleasures; he thought few of them worth the price which has to be paid for them; and he set down the greater number of the miscarriages in life as due to an excessive estimate of them. 'He thought human life a poor thing at best, after the freshness of youth and of unsatisfied curiosity had gone by. . . . . He would sometimes say that if life were made what it might be, by good government and good education, it would be worth having; but he never spoke with anything like enthusiasm even of that possibility.' We should shrink from calling even this theory dreary, associated as it is with the rigorous enforcement of the heroic virtues of temper-

ance and moderation, and the strenuous and careful bracing up of every faculty to face the inevitable and make the best of it. At bottom it is the theory of many of the bravest souls, who fare grimly through life in the mood of leaders of forlorn hopes, denying pleasures, yet very sensible of the stern delight of fortitude. We can have no difficulty in understanding that, when the elder Mill lay dying, 'his interest in all things and persons that had interested him through life was undiminished, nor did the approach of death cause the smallest wavering, (as in so strong and firm a mind it was impossible that it should,) in his convictions on the subject of religion. His principal satisfaction, after he knew that his end was near, seemed to be the thought of what he had done to make the world better than he found it; and his chief regret in not living longer, that he had not had time to do more' (p. 203).[1]

Mr. Mill, however, went beyond this conception. He had a belief in pleasures, and thought human life by no means a poor thing to those who know how to make the best of it. It was essential both to the stability of his utilitarian philosophy, and to the contentment of his own temperament, that the reality of happiness should be vindicated, and he did both vindicate and attain it. A highly pleasurable excitement that should have no end, of course he did not think possible; but he regarded the two constituents of a satisfied life, much tranquillity and some excitement, as perfectly attainable by many men, and as ultimately attainable by very many more. The ingredients of this satisfaction he set forth as follows:—a willingness not to expect more from life than life is capable of bestowing; an intelligent interest in the objects of mental

[1] For the mood in which death was faced by another person who had renounced theology and the doctrine of a future state of consciousness, see Miss Martineau's *Autobiography*, ii. 435, etc.

culture; genuine private affections; and a sincere interest in the public good. What, on the other hand, are the hindrances which prevent these elements from being in the possession of every one born in a civilized country? Ignorance; bad laws or customs, debarring a man or woman from the sources of happiness within reach; and 'the positive evils of life, the great sources of physical and mental suffering—such as indigence, disease, and the unkindness, worthlessness, or premature loss of objects of affection.'[1] But every one of these calamitous impediments is susceptible of the weightiest modification, and some of them of final removal. Mr. Mill had learnt from Turgot and Condorcet—two of the wisest and noblest of men, as he justly calls them (113)—among many other lessons, this of the boundless improvableness of the human lot, and we may believe that he read over many a time the pages in which Condorcet delineated the Tenth Epoch in the history of human perfectibility, and traced out in words of finely reserved enthusiasm the operation of the forces which should consummate the progress of the race. 'All the grand sources of human suffering,' Mr. Mill thought, 'are in a great degree, many of them a most entirely, conquerable by human care and effort; and though their removal is grievously slow—though a long succession of generations will perish in the breach before the conquest is completed, and this world becomes all that, if will and knowledge were not wanting, it might easily be made—yet every mind sufficiently intelligent and generous to bear a part, however small and unconspicuous, in the endeavour, will draw a noble enjoyment from the contest itself, which he would not for any bribe in the form of selfish indulgence consent to be without.' (*Utilitarianism*, 22.)

We thus see how far from dreary this wise and benign man

[1] For this exposition see *Utilitarianism*, pp. 18—24.

actually found his own life; how full it was of cheerfulness, of animation, of persevering search, of a tranquillity lighted up at wholesome intervals by flashes of intellectual and moral excitement. That it was not seldom crossed by moods of despondency is likely enough, but we may at least be sure that these moods had nothing in common with the vulgar despondency of those whose hopes are centred in material prosperity in this world and spiritual prosperity in some other. They were, at least, the dejection of a magnanimous spirit, that could only be cast down by some new hindrance to the spread of reason and enlightenment among men, or some new weakening of their incentives to right doing.

Much has been said against Mr. Mill's strictures on society, and his withdrawal from it. If we realise the full force of all that he says of his own purpose in life, it is hard to see how either his opinion or his practice could have been different. He ceased to be content with 'seconding the superficial improvements' in common ways of thinking, and saw the necessity of working at a fundamental re-constitution of accepted modes of thought. This in itself implies a condemnation of a social intercourse that rests on the base of conventional ways of looking at things. The better kind of society, it is true, appears to contain two classes; not only the class that will hear nothing said hostile to the greater social conventions, including among these the popular theology, but also another class who will tolerate or even encourage attack on the greater social conventions, and a certain mild discussion of improvements in them—provided only neither attack nor discussion be conducted in too serious a vein. A new idea about God, or property, or the family, is handed round among the company, as ladies of quality in Queen Anne's time handed round a black

page or a China monster. In Bishop Butler's phrase, these people only want to know what is said, not what is true. To be in earnest, to show that you mean what you say, to think of drawing blood in the encounter, is thought, and perhaps very naturally thought, to be a piece of bad manners. Social intercourse can only exist either pleasantly or profitably among people who share a great deal of common ground in opinion and feeling. Mr. Mill, no doubt, was always anxious to find as much common ground as he honestly could, for this was one of the most characteristic maxims of his propagandism. But a man who had never been brought up in the popular religion, and who had been brought up in habits of the most scrupulous fair dealing with his own understanding; who had never closed his mind to new truths from likely sources, but whose character was formed, and whose mind was made up, on the central points of opinion, was not in a position to derive much benefit from those who in all respects represent a less advanced stage of mental development. On the other hand, all the benefit which they were in a position to derive from him could be adequately secured by reading what he wrote. Perhaps there is nothing wiser among the wise things written in the Autobiography, than the remarks on the fact that persons of any mental superiority, who greatly frequent society, are greatly deteriorated by it. 'Not to mention loss of time, the tone of their feelings is lowered: they become less in earnest about those of their opinions respecting which they must remain silent in the society they frequent: they come to look on their most elevated objects as unpractical, or at least too remote from realisation to be more than a vision or a theory: and if, more fortunate than most, they retain their higher principles unimpaired, yet with respect to the persons and affairs of their own day, they insensibly adopt the modes of feeling and judg-

ment in which they can hope for sympathy from the company they keep' (p. 228). That a man loses something, nay, that he loses much, by being deprived of animating intercourse with other men, Mr. Mill would probably have been the first to admit. Where that intercourse can be had, nothing is more fit to make the judgment robust, nothing more fit to freshen and revive our interests, and to clothe them with reality. Even second-rate companionship has some clear advantages. The question is, whether these advantages outweigh the equally clear disadvantages. Mr. Mill was persuaded that they do not.

Those whom disgust at the aimlessness and insignificance of most of our social intercourse may dispose to withdrawal from it—and their number will probably increase as the reaction against intellectual flippancy goes on—will do well to remember that Mr. Mill's retirement and his vindication of it sprang from no moral valetudinarianism. He did not retire to gratify any self-indulgent whim, but only in order to work the more uninterruptedly *and definitely*. The Autobiography tells us what pains he took to keep himself informed of all that was going on in every part of the world. 'In truth, the modern facilities of communication have not only removed all the disadvantages, to a political writer in tolerably easy circumstances, of distance from the scene of political action, but have converted them into advantages.' The immediate and regular receipt of newspapers and periodicals keeps him *au courant* of even the most temporary politics, and gives him a much more correct view of the state and progress of opinion than he could acquire by personal contact with individuals: for every one's social intercourse is more or less limited to particular sets or classes, whose impressions and no others reach him through that channel; and experience has taught me that those who

give their time to the absorbing claims of what is called society, not having leisure to keep up a large acquaintance with the organs of opinion, remain much more ignorant of the general state either of the public mind, or of the active and instructed part of it, than a recluse who reads the newspapers need be. There are, no doubt, disadvantages in too long a separation from one's country—in not occasionally renewing one's impressions of the light in which men and things appear when seen from a position in the midst of them; but the deliberate judgment formed at a distance, and undisturbed by inequalities of perspective, is the most to be depended on, even for application in practice. Alternating between the two positions, I combined the advantages of both.' Those who knew him will perhaps agree that he was more widely and precisely informed of the transactions of the day, in every department of activity all over the world, than any other person of their acquaintance. People should remember, further, that though Mr. Mill saw comparatively little of men after a certain time, yet he was for many years of his life in constant and active relations with men. It was to his experience in the Indian Office that he attributed some of his most serviceable qualities, especially this: 'I learnt how to obtain the best I could, when I could not obtain everything; instead of being indignant or dispirited because I could not have entirely my own way, to be pleased and encouraged when I could have the smallest part of it; and when even that could not be, to bear with complete equanimity the being overruled altogether' (pp. 85,8 6). In these words we seem almost to hear the modest and simple tones of the writer's own voice.

MR. MILL ON RELIGION.

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THERE are two essays in Mr. Mill's volume on religion, which naturally excite the most eager interest in a time of religious fermentation. These are the second, which discusses the Utility of Religion, and the third, which deals with Theism. To us both the conclusions at which Mr. Mill arrives, and, what is even more important, the spirit of the conclusions, are a rather keen surprise. But notwithstanding this, Mr. Mill's treatment of his subject certainly on the whole makes it more interesting, and not less so. We may think the reasoning at some points halt of foot; we may discern arguments unclinched; we may deplore the virtual elevation of naked and arbitrary possibilities into the place of reasonable probabilities. Still it would be mere petulance, even where the pages least carry conviction to those who were fed on the *System of Logic*, not to be sensible of a certain breath of pensive sincerity, a deep-eyed solicitude for tender consciences, an anxious allowance for diversity of mental operation and temperament. There is a meditative simplicity of tone, which affects us as if we had overheard the speeches in unconscious soliloquy. It must always, however, be a poor way of showing respect to one's best teacher, to veil or muffle our strong dissent. Mr. Mill had a greater aversion for nothing than for the spirit of sect, or the personal partisanship of a philosophic school. He would have counted it a great fault if the humblest disciple of Plato had feared to renounce the reactionary doctrine of the *Laws*.

He would not have thought less ill of a follower of his own, who should be deterred either by the deepest consciousness of intellectual and moral inferiority, or by the recollection of personal kindness, from stating such objections as might occur to him against any new deliverance, with all the freedom and directness at his command.

The essay on the Utility of Religion is an attempt to answer three questions. Is religion of direct service to temporal interests, a direct instrument of social good? Is it useful in improving and ennobling individual human nature? If its utility in either of these two ways be allowed, must the form of religion necessarily be supernatural, involving a journey beyond the boundaries of the world that we inhabit, and beyond anything which could be supplied by the idealisation of our earthly life?

The great importance of a discussion of these particular issues at the present moment is undeniable. As ordinary men find themselves losing the conviction of old beliefs, the more readily they lean on the notion that such beliefs are socially indispensable. That idea enables them to reconcile conformity and its numerous conveniences, with the gratification of their intellectual vanity by private disbelief. Most recent controversies are marked by obliqueness, evasiveness, a shiftiness of issue. These disagreeable features of discussion are due in the better sort of disputants to an uncertainty in their minds, whether it may not be the case that, in the sphere of religion, disclosure of the truth will inflict irreparable moral injury both on human nature and on organized society. The French Revolution first made this apprehension of the social perilousness of truth an important element in European thought. The insurrection of Paris in 1871 operated strongly in the

same direction in our own day. It has inclined even free-thinkers 'of the baser sort' to regard truth as by no means coincident under all circumstances with social welfare, and superstition as by no means an inconsiderable element in preserving social stability.

Apart from social utility, many persons, as Mr. Mill says—

'Having observed in others or experienced in themselves elevated feelings which they imagine incapable of emanating from any other source than religion, have an honest aversion to anything tending as they think to dry up the fountain of such feelings. They, therefore, either dislike and disparage all philosophy, or addict themselves with intolerant zeal to those forms of it in which intuition usurps the place of evidence, and internal feeling is made the test of objective truth. *The whole of the prevalent metaphysics of the present century is one tissue of suborned evidence in favour of religion;* often of Deism only, but in any case involving a misapplication of noble impulses and speculative capacities among the most deplorable of those wretched wastes of human faculties, which make us wonder that enough is left to keep mankind progressive, at however slow a pace. It is time to consider, more impartially and therefore more deliberately than is usually done, whether all this straining to prop up beliefs which require so great an expense of intellectual toil and ingenuity to keep them standing, yields any sufficient return in human well-being; and whether that end would not be better served by a frank recognition that certain subjects are inaccessible to our faculties, and by the application of the same mental powers to the strengthening and enlargement of those other sources of virtue and happiness, which stand in no need of the support or sanction of supernatural beliefs and inducements' (p. 72).

First, then, is religious belief an instrument of social good? As a supplement to human laws, as 'an auxiliary to the thief-catcher and hangman,' Mr. Mill thinks that its office could be

dispensed with. The influence with which religion is commonly credited in this way, is really due to conditions that would make any moral system equally efficacious, even a system devoid of religious sanction or association. Such conditions are these:—(1) Religion is backed by the whole weight of social authority, and this social authority powerfully affects the *involuntary* leanings of men. (2) The whole energy of the impressions of early education goes to the side of religious beliefs. (3) The force of public opinion operates directly on the voluntary sentiments in favour of the religious belief which it countenances, whether men's involuntary sentiments are affected by it or not. Thus if we deduct from the social influence attributed to religion what it owes to motives not directly religious, but derived from social authority, from the effect of early education, and from the power of public opinion, we then find that its intrinsic force as a moral deterrent becomes hardly worth taking into account. Where the power of public opinion has been on one side, and on the other only a religious obligation, it is the former which triumphs. Mr. Mill refers to Bentham's three illustrations of this; namely, customary oaths, duelling, and sexual irregularities. In each of these cases public opinion approved or pardoned what the religion of the society condemned, and the religious penalties were the less dreaded of the two. Perhaps Mr. Mill might have produced a broader historic instance still in the institution of slavery. 'Neither the doctrines of Christianity,' says Mr. Finlay, 'nor the sentiments of humanity have ever yet succeeded in extinguishing slavery, where the soil could be cultivated with profit by slave labour. No Christian community of slaveholders has yet voluntarily abolished slavery. In no country where it prevailed, has rural slavery ceased, until the price of productions raised by slave labour has fallen so low as to leave

no profit to the slave-owner.' That is to say, the religious motive was more than counterbalanced by the favour of a public opinion which was inspired by material interests.

It would have been enough for Mr. Mill's purpose to stop at the position that religion has been powerful in producing certain great effects on human conduct, 'not by its intrinsic force, but because it has wielded the additional and more mighty power of public opinion.' All that he has to show is that religious sanctions work only when aided by public opinion. But in one passage he seems to favour the questionable opinion that religious sanctions are not the operative part of the matter.

'Rewards and punishments postponed to that distance of time, and never seen by the eye, are not calculated, even when infinite and eternal, to have, on ordinary minds, a very powerful effect in opposition to strong temptation. Their remoteness alone is a prodigious deduction from their efficacy, on such minds as those which most require the restraint of punishment. A still greater abatement is their uncertainty, which belongs to them from the very nature of the case: for rewards and punishments administered after death, must be awarded not definitely to particular actions, but on a general survey of the person's whole life, and he easily persuades himself that whatever may have been his peccadilloes, there will be a balance in his favour at the last. All positive religions aid this self-delusion. Bad religions teach that divine vengeance may be bought off, by offerings, or personal abasement; the better religions, not to drive sinners to despair, dwell so much on the divine mercy, that hardly any one is compelled to think himself irrevocably condemned. The sole quality in these punishments which might seem calculated to make them efficacious, their overpowering magnitude, is itself a reason why nobody (except a hypochondriac here and there) ever really believes that he is in any very serious danger of incurring them. Even the worst malefactor is hardly able to think that any crime he has had it in his power to commit, any evil he

can have inflicted in this short space of existence, can have deserved torture extending through an eternity. Accordingly religious writers and preachers are never tired of complaining how little effect religious motives have on men's lives and conduct, notwithstanding the tremendous penalties denounced' (pp. 89, 90).

There is much wholesome truth in this. Religious motives are undoubtedly immeasurably less effectual than it is the fashion for preachers to assert in their arguments with sceptics. But the above passage seems to allege more than is necessary. I think it would be very hard to show that religious motives, however derived and shaped, have in a general way little effect. Nor is that of the essence of the question. The question is whether motives dissociated from religion, and solely dependent for their force on social authority, early education, and public opinion, would suffice to prompt good conduct, as effectually—whether that be little or much—as motives not thus dissociated from religion. It perhaps gives an equivocal help towards an affirmative answer, to disparage the potency of religious motives; experience really shows this potency to be not inconsiderable, though we believe it to be derivative. In short, Mr. Mill's account of the existing state of feeling about the religious sanctions is not so obviously and unqualifiedly true, that an opponent may not be able to make its questionableness a means of evading the central issue. That issue is whether public opinion could not avail to enforce morality, without supernatural sanctions. Do we not best answer this, not by asserting the nullity of such sanctions, which is very doubtful as matter of fact, but by showing that their efficaciousness costs in other ways more than it is worth?

Mr. Mill next considers this objection—that though human motives may be sufficient to make moral rules obeyed, yet were

it not for the religious idea, we should not have had the moral rules themselves. This is one of those arguments which the official apologists resort to, not out of the fulness of their own historical knowledge, or because they have any evidence that their allegation is at all true, but because they know how difficult it will be for their opponents to prove that it is false. In such cases it is enough to meet them by a direct traverse, throwing the burden of proof upon them. What moral rule do we possess which cannot be found to have had an existence independent of its association with religion? And this, even if its power in the world be proved to be due to its having been adopted by some religion? Mr. Mill does no meet the objection in this way. He partially admits the fact, and then endeavours to turn it. The admission is of a very unstable and doubtful kind. 'I grant that some of the precepts of Christ as exhibited in the Gospels—rising far above the Paulism which is the foundation of ordinary Christianity —carry some kinds of moral goodness to a greater height than had ever been attained before, though much even of what is supposed to be peculiar to them is equalled in the Meditations of Marcus Antoninus, which we have no ground for believing to have been in any way indebted to Christianity' (pp. 97, 98).

After this not very firm treatment of the proposition that we owe to religion the moral rules which everybody agrees that it would be desirable to preserve, Mr. Mill proceeds to argue the consequence of the admission. Even if it be true that religion has given us the moral rules, he maintains that the highest moralities which we owe to Christ, for instance, 'are surely in sufficient harmony with the intellect and feelings of every good man or woman, to be in no danger of being let go, after having been once acknowledged as the creed of the best and foremost portion of our species. There will be, as there

have been, shortcomings enough for a long time to come in acting on them; but that they should be forgotten, or cease to be operative on the human conscience, while human beings remain cultivated or civilised, may be pronounced once for all impossible' (p. 99).

One could perhaps wish that the line of argument which is suggested here had been rather more laboured. For if anybody chooses to maintain that we are expecting the effect to follow after we have withdrawn the cause, this position is at first sight a plausible one enough. One writer, for example, says of a sense of duty which is justified by a certain form of religion, that 'if the belief should ever fail, the sense of duty which grows out of it would die by degrees;' and he warns people who are inclined to think otherwise, that 'though custom makes some duties so easy to some people that they are discharged as a matter of course, there are others which it is extremely difficult to discharge at all; and that obvious immediate self-interest, in its narrowest shape, is constantly eating away the edges of morality, and would destroy it, if it had not something deeper for its support than an historical or physiological explanation.'

The answer to this kind of view is that it overlooks the persistent tendency of moral truths to take a permanent place in character, which in time becomes quite independent of the conditions that first opened a way for them into men's minds. Such a tendency is explained by the accumulated strength of habit; by the fitness of these moral truths to the circumstances of life; and by their harmony, as Mr. Mill expresses it, with the intellect and feelings of every good man or woman. Kant talks of the process which exalts 'a social consent that had been *pathologically* extorted from the mere necessities of situation, into a *moral* union.' An analogous process transforms the

base of moral ideas. It exalts them from the superstitions of their origin into rational truths, finally built into the higher types of human nature. It is untrue that self-interest is always eating away the edges of morality. On the contrary, the history of civilisation shows morality offering a surface that is continually growing more and more indurated against the tooth of self-interest. Civilisation has been brought to its present point by a gradually increasing preponderance of the moral over the purely egoistic impulses. This is plainly one of the most important sides of what we mean by social progress. We have no better ground for assuming a spontaneous tendency towards retrogression in a moral type that has once definitely established itself, than we have for assuming the corresponding tendency in the type of a physical species that has once acquired its definite marks. Nor would it be true, in presence of these considerations, to say that we who expect strongly altruistic moralty to survive, after being divorced from the religious system which first made a gospel of it, shall be expecting an effect after removing the cause. The religious system may have been the cause of the spread of altruistic habit, and its confirmation among human impulses. But that habit itself becomes in time a new cause; a new ground and antecedent for its own persistency. This shortly indicates the fuller answer that is to be made to those, who urge that by tampering with religion you are knocking away the only props of the morality that was first practised in association with it. And we may add, in fine, that whatever may have been the original debt of morality to religion, it can by no means exceed the subsequent debt of religion to morality. 'One of the hardest burdens,' as Mr. Mill says, 'laid upon the other good influences of human nature has been that of improving religion itself' (p. 75). Or, as it has been expressed, 'The history of

the civilisation of the earth is the history of the civilisation of Olympus.'

The second and third questions of the essay are both answered by Mr. Mill affirmatively. Religion is of value to the individual, improving and satisfying man's nature, apart from its influence on society as a whole. And, secondly, these benefits of religion may be attained without travelling beyond the boundaries of human existence. The general conclusion of the second essay is that the sense of unity with mankind, and a deep feeling for the general good, may be cultivated into a sentiment and a principle which would fulfil the functions of religion better than any form whatever of supernaturalism. 'It is not only entitled to be called a religion; it is a better religion than any of those which are ordinarily called by that title' (p. 110). The reasons given for the latter proposition are, first, that such a sentiment would be disinterested, whereas supernatural religion is bound up with interested fears and hopes. Second, that it involves no torpidity nor twist in either intellectual or moral faculties, such as is inseparable from the acceptance of any known form of supernatural religion.

A serious drawback to the value of this otherwise most weighty essay is that we are unable to find in it a true or even a consistent account of what Religion is. Mr. Mill considers religion to be the expression of the same cravings as those which inspire Poetry: the cravings for 'ideal conceptions grander and more beautiful than we see realised in the prose of human life.' The distinction between poetry and religion is that religion is the product of a yearning to know 'whether these imaginative conceptions have realities answering to them in some other world than ours.' Now I find myself unable to derive from the pages in which these remarks occur, taken in

conjunction with the remainder of the essay, a clear and firm idea of what the writer took to be the essence of religion. Here, as we have seen, he apparently mentions it as an essential and permanent element in religion as distinct from poetry, that it is concerned with actual or supposed realities '*in some other world than ours*.' This qualification is obviously of vital moment. Yet at p. 109 it disappears, and we are only told that 'the essence of religion is the strong and earnest direction of the emotions and desires towards an ideal object, recognised as of the highest excellence, and rightfully paramount over all selfish objects of desire.' But is this ideal object to be looked for in other worlds than ours? It would seem not, because the very gist of all this part of the essay is that 'the idealisation of our earthly life is capable of supplying a poetry, and, in the best sense of the word, a religion, equally fitted to exalt the feelings, and still better calculated to ennoble the conduct, than any belief respecting the unseen powers.' To this we utter a fervent Amen; but then what has become of that definition of religion which marked its scope 'in some other world than ours'? Another striking passage in the same way places the region of the religious imagination in the land of the unseen and unknowable:—

'Human existence is girt round with mystery: the narrow region of our experience is a small island in the midst of a boundless sea, which at once awes our feelings and stimulates our imagination by its vastness and its obscurity. To add to the mystery, the domain of our earthly existence is not only an island in infinite space, but also in infinite time. The past and the future are alike shrouded from us: we neither know the origin of anything which is, nor its final destination. If we feel deeply interested in knowing that there are myriads of worlds at an immeasurable, and to our faculties inconceivable, distance from us in space; if we are eager

to discover what little we can about these worlds, and when we cannot know what they are, can never satiate ourselves with speculating on what they may be; is it not a matter of far deeper interest to us to learn, or even to conjecture, from whence came this nearer world which we inhabit; what cause or agency made it what it is, and on what powers depend its future fate? Who would not desire this more ardently than any other conceivable knowledge, so long as there appeared the slightest hope of attaining it? What would not one give for any credible tidings from that mysterious region, any glimpse into it, which might enable us to see the smallest light through its darkness, especially any theory of it which we could believe, and which represented it as tenanted by a benignant and not a hostile influence? But since we are able to penetrate into that region with the imagination only, assisted by specious but inconclusive analogies derived from human agency and design, imagination is free to fill up the vacancy with the imagery most congenial to itself; sublime and elevating if it be a lofty imagination, low and mean if it be a grovelling one' (pp. 102, 103).

In view of such a conception as this, whether right or not, the Religion of Duty lacks a vital mark of religion, and cannot be regarded as more than a highly poetised morality.

Whatever the explanation may be, it is surely in the worst degree inconvenient and confusing to pass from one sense of the word to another, and silently to relegate what was first declared to be of the essence, to the region of the separable accident. To speak a little more at large—is it clear that we can extract from the sentences of Mr. Mill such a comprehensive and penetrating notion of religion as shall at once take in these two states of mind—one of them yearning after knowledge of some other world than ours, the other satisfied with some ideal object, of which we only may ask that it shall be of the highest excellence and paramount over all selfish objects of desire?

In what he says of the essence of religion being the strong and earnest direction of the emotions and desires towards an object of that kind, is he not being drawn by that passion of his for seizing above all else the ethical aspects of things human or divine, into leaving out those vital elements of religion which are not and never can be reducible to ethical expression? In the *Autobiography* (p. 46) he declares the principal worth of all religions whatever to be constituted by their possession of 'an ideal conception of a Perfect Being, to which men habitually refer as the guide of their conscience.' Undoubtedly this is the principal worth of religion, from the point of view of the moralist, that it should guide conscience, that it should direct emotions and desires towards highly excellent ends, that it should tend to subordinate egoism to altruism. Religion, like everything else, may be moral or immoral. But morality is not of the essence of religion; is not its vital or constitutive element; does not give us the secret of its deep attachments in the human heart. Religion is not in any way the outcome of the moral part of us; it is at its root wholly unconnected with principles of conduct; it has its rise in a sphere of feeling as absolutely independent of all our moral relations, as a poem like Shelley's *Skylark* is independent of them, or a piece of ineffable heart-searching melody by Beethoven or Handel. Why is it that in reading the religious compositions of the eighteenth century, always excepting certain pages of Rousseau, we all feel that the breath of religious sentiment has never passed over them? In all these books the morality of religion seems to quench that spirituality which is its true essence. The characteristic deliverances of the religious emotions are not to be described in terms of ethics. Take the *Imitatio*, and read that in the light of a guide to conscience, or a direction to an object of the

highest excellence, or an exaltation of altruism over egoism. Is not to do this to lose the whole soul of those divine musings, that ethereal meditation, those soft-glowing ecstasies, that passion of contemplation by the inmost eye? To put the matter shortly, what are we to say is the note of Holiness as something beyond and apart from Virtue?

Before leaving the second essay, I should like to make some observations on a rather remarkable parenthesis which it contains. After expanding the proposition that there never can be any conflict between truth and utility, Mr. Mill proceeds to assert a very important qualification of this proposition.

'It is not enough,' he says, 'to aver, in general terms, that there never can be any conflict between truth and utility; that if religion be false, nothing but good can be the consequence of rejecting it. For, though the knowledge of every positive truth is a useful acquisition, this doctrine cannot without reservation be applied to negative truth. When the only truth ascertainable is that nothing can be known, we do not, by this knowledge, gain any new fact by which to guide ourselves; we are, at best, only disabused of our trust in some former guide-mark, which, though itself fallacious, may have pointed in the same direction with the best indications we have, and if it happens to be more conspicuous and legible, may have kept us right when they might have been overlooked' (p. 73).

The distinction between positive and negative truths, although a real and important one, is surely here pressed too hard. If it be true that nothing can be known in a given direction in which men have been accustomed both to search for knowledge, and to persuade themselves that they have found it, then to ascertain that *is* a new fact by which to guide ourselves. To become 'disabused of our trust in some former guide-mark' is the first condition of curiosity and energy in

seeking guide-marks which shall be more worthy of trust. Or, to borrow Mr. Mill's own phrases, 'a frank recognition that certain subjects are inaccessible to our faculties'—and this is a negative truth, if ever there was one—is the first step towards the positive process of 'strengthening and enlarging those other sources of virtue and happiness which stand in no need of the support or sanction of supernatural beliefs and inducements.' It is true that the positive propositions of supernatural religions do now and then point in the same direction with the best indications we have. But then it is alleged by unbelievers that such religions on the whole have the effect of enervating the reasoning faculties, of engendering vicious habits of spiritual self-indulgence, of encouraging intellectual and moral sophistication. If this be so, then the mere negation of them will do less harm than good.

This is made the more clear by two considerations. First, the beneficial moral tendencies which are associated with certain theological propositions, lie in the nature of things. They possess an independent fitness. This fitness and conformity to circumstance may be trusted to keep such tendencies alive, after the theological association has ceased to be defensible. The assertion of mere negative truths leaves the way all the more open for these natural fitnesses to disclose themselves, and for the substitution of the strong defence of reality instead of the weak defence of superstition. And let us add, if this argument be not admitted, that if there may have been at first some support for useful truths in their association with theological beliefs, there is this set-off; namely, that in proportion as the theological beliefs become untenable, there is a risk of the useful truths being involved in the same ruin. The connection between the two was therefore from the first of equivocal utility, if we only take a sufficiently ample survey

to comprehend the bearings of the connection from beginning to end. The second consideration is this. Though the guide-mark may have pointed in the right direction—towards charity, humility, brotherly love, and so forth—and in so far may have been useful, yet the motives which prompted men in accepting its authority, may be so debilitating, retarding, distorting as to more than counterbalance the advantage of occasional and partial rightness of direction. In that case, even mere negation is the removal of something which happens to have the advantage of confirming rational conclusions in one or two directions, while it has the fundamental disadvantage of weakening rational habits of thinking.

This seems to be the answer to another sentence of Mr. Mill's in the same passage. He pronounces it 'perfectly conceivable that religion may be morally useful without being intellectually sustainable.' This is a truly remarkable sentence, considering its authorship. For one thing, it is very ambiguous. Does it mean that religion may be morally useful to the man who knows it to be intellectually indefensible? Or only to people who are not yet alive to its want of intellectual foundation? Does it mean that a creed may be morally beneficial to us, after we have discerned that it is untrue? Or that, in spite of its being untrue, it may be morally beneficial to other persons who have not found out how little true it is?

If the meaning be the latter, the proposition is expressed in a misleading way, because then the religion *is* intellectually sustainable in the minds of those to whom it it morally useful. The sentence ought in such a case to run, that religion may be morally useful to some persons, even without being intellectually sustainable to other persons. The tendency of such a proposition is undoubtedly towards maxims of reserve, conformity, and compromise. Because if there are still societies

and portions of society in such a condition as to receive moral advantage from an untrue religion, a serious man would certainly think twice before doing anything by conduct or speech to weaken its utility. A phrase in the next part of the sentence, however, perhaps makes it probable that Mr. Mill did not mean this, but that a religion might be morally useful to a man after he had ceased to believe it true. There is even in that sense something misleading in such a way of stating an undeniable fact. For instance, it might be said that Christianity remains morally useful to men, after they have ceased to believe in its supernatural pretensions. But if we consider what we mean by such a statement, it is this; that we may still find usefulness in certain of the Christian moralities which are intellectually sustainable, even after repudiating certain other parts of the scheme which are not intellectually sustainable. In other words, some of the moral truths that have been associated with a religion remain useful, after the intellectual base has been changed. But then they only remain useful because, and in so far as, they are true. This surely is very different in significance and intention from the too bald proposition that a religion may be morally useful after it has ceased to be intellectually sustainable. Whatever may be the force of these criticisms, it must at any rate be counted extremely unfortunate that Mr. Mill should have enunciated in this indeterminate and unqualified form a proposition so important, so complex, so dependent for whatever truth it may contain upon a number of indispensable qualifications. As it stands the passage is fatally well fitted—though assuredly without any such design in the mind of its author—to justify all those conformities, compliances, economies, and accommodations, that men are naturally so ready to practise, partly because they are unwilling to face the untold discomforts of

dissent, partly from a more creditable reluctance to do anything to shake the foundations of a fabric in which good men and women still find spiritual shelter.

The general conclusions of the second essay, then, are that the religion of duty is capable of fulfilling the functions of religion better than any form whatever of supernaturalism. The third essay, strange to say, is on its most important side a qualified rehabilitation of supernatural hypotheses.

The essay on Theism has both a negative and a positive aspect. It overthrows some of the most commonly defended arguments in favour of a benevolent and omnipotent Creator of the universe, of the immortality of the soul, and of a miraculously accredited revelation. On this side of the treatise we have nothing to say. Its positive or reconstructive side is much more important. The reconstruction, it is true, results in a very modest and unsubstantial fabric. The principles, however, on which the foundations of this singularly unpretending edifice of belief are laid, are capable of supporting much more elaborate structures. Shortly put, the central or fundamental conclusions are these.

To deny that there is any evidence on either side in the question of the existence of a Deity, is a form of atheism not less inconsistent with a rational attitude in a thinking mind, than the dogmatic denial of his existence. There is evidence, amounting to one of the lower degrees of probability, that the present order of the universe has been devised by an Intelligent Mind. Such evidence is found in the adaptations to be observed in Nature; in the nice and intricate combinations of vegetable and animal life, showing a connection through causation between the origin of the arrangements of nature and the ends they fulfil.

The same evidences in nature lead us to suppose that the author of Kosmos worked under limitations. He is not omnipotent, but is obliged to adapt himself to conditions independent of his will, and to reach his ends by such devices and arrangements as these conditions permit.

The appearances in nature which make it in a low degree probable that there is a Creator of limited power, furnish a certain amount of justification for the inference that benevolence is one of his attributes. There are many signs that pleasure is agreeable to him, and few or none that pain is so.

As we do not know the limits either of the power or the goodness of the Creator, whose existence is in a low degree probable, there is room to hope that he may be both powerful enough and good enough to grant us the gift of immortality, or life after bodily dissolution, provided that gift should seem to him to be likely to do us any good.

Finally, 'Considering that the order of nature affords some evidence of the reality of a Creator, and of his bearing goodwill to his creatures, though not of its being the sole prompter of his conduct towards them: considering, again, that all the evidence of his existence is evidence also that he is not all-powerful, and considering that in our ignorance of the limits of his power we cannot positively decide that he was able to provide for us by the original plan of Creation all the good which it entered into his intentions to bestow upon us, or even to bestow any part of it at any earlier period than that at which we actually received it—considering these things, when we consider further that a gift, extremely precious, came to us which, though facilitated, was not apparently necessitated by what had gone before, but was due, as far as appearances go, to the peculiar mental and moral endowments of one man, and that *man* openly proclaimed that it did not come from himself but

from God through him,—then we are entitled to say that there is nothing so inherently impossible or absolutely incredible in this supposition, as to preclude any one from hoping that it may perhaps be true.'

In making some observations on this remarkable scheme of probabilities and potentialities, we shall begin with the position assigned by Mr. Mill to Christianity. The reader will bear in mind that the objections which we feel to this position, lie only as against an avowedly positive and scientific thinker such as Mr. Mill was, and neither have, nor are meant to have, any force against the transcendentalist or the mystic.

Firstly, we have to consider the following position: that 'to the conception of the rational sceptic it remains a possibility that Christ actually was what he supposed himself to be . . . a man charged with a special, express, and unique commission from God to lead mankind to truth and virtue' (p. 255). Now whether this is a possibility in the abstract, we are not here called upon to discuss. The question which interests us is whether the acceptance of such a possibility is reconcilable with that positive or scientific conception of the movement of human society, and the development of human nature, which Mr. Mill himself was the first to propagate and partially popularise in this country. Was the commission with which God charged Christ, *special, express, and unique*, in any sense which would not apply equally well to all other conspicuous moral reformers, from Socrates and Confucius downwards? If it was not, surely Mr. Mill, for the first time in the work of his whole life, is doing nothing less than trifling with words. And if it was, if on a given occasion God, specially and expressly conferred upon a certain personage gifts which would not and could not have devolved upon him in the undisturbed course of ordinary cause and effect, then what becomes

of sociology and the science of history? For no theist can believe in the possibility of a science of social development, or in there being scientific laws of ethological growth, if he believes also that a most critical and important step in that development was due to special, express, and unique intervention on the part of the Supreme Being. This very obvious line of objection, however, would seem to be accepted by Mr. Mill himself, for twenty pages further back we find the following passage:—

'Let it be remembered also that the goodness of God affords no presumption in favour of a deviation from his general system of government, unless the good purpose could not have been attained without deviation. If God intended that mankind should receive Christianity or any other gift, it would have agreed better with all that we know of his government to have made provision in the scheme of creation for its arising at the appointed time by *natural development; which, let it be added, all the knowledge we now possess concerning the history of the human mind, tends to the conclusion that it actually did.*' (p. 236).

But then, if this be so, what kind of meaning are we to attach to the emphatic words of the passage we are discussing —'special, express, and unique'? If they hint that Christ was charged with a mission in a sense in which Socrates or Confucius,—yes, or any other opener of the human mind, intellectual as well as moral, an Aristotle, a Descartes, or a Newton,—was not charged with a mission, then there was a deviation from the general system of the government of the world. If, on the contrary, there was no deviation, then to speak of the transaction as even potentially special, express, and unique is illusory. And considering the use which is sure to be made of such an account of the matter, we will add, it is

not only illusory, but directly and practically injurious. We are not now contending with theologians, but with a positive thinker, if ever there was one. If a person has once grasped the conception that the phenomena of human nature are as much reducible to general laws as the phenomena of the heavenly bodies—and the writer of the sixth book of the *System of Logic* would hardly have conceded the name of 'rational' sceptic to any one falling short of this amount of scientific belief—then I am unable to conceive how such a person can admit the possibility of Christ's mission being special or express, any more readily than the possibility of the sun having stood still upon Gibeon at the command of Joshua, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon. If 'all the knowledge we now possess concerning the history of the human mind tends to the conclusion that Christianity arose at the appointed time by natural development'—in what sense, by the way, can the time have been *appointed?*—then is it not worse than futile to dwell on the possibility of its having arisen otherwise than by natural development, specially, expressly, and uniquely?

Let us turn to another part of the passage in which there is the same uncertainty of note. After enumerating the considerations about the reality of a Creator, the limitation of his powers, and so forth, Mr. Mill says:—'When we consider further that a gift [namely the moralities enunciated by Christ], extremely precious, came to us which, though facilitated, was not apparently necessitated by what had gone before, but was due, as far as appearances go, to the peculiar mental and moral endowments of one man, and that man openly proclaimed that it did not come from himself but from God through him, then we are entitled to say that there is nothing so inherently impossible or absolutely incredible in this supposition as to preclude any one from hoping that it may

perhaps be true' (p. 240). We may note, in passing, how perplexing it is that Mr. Mill should have thought it worth while to refer to Christ's own ascription of his discourse to God, when in the next sentence he reminds us that 'in pre-scientific times men always supposed that any unusual faculties which came to them, they knew not how, were an inspiration from God,' and declines to attach 'any evidentiary value even to the testimony of Christ on such a subject.' Whether strictly evidentiary or not, he clearly wished value of some kind or other to be attached to Christ's claim to be divinely inspired, or else he would not have enumerated it among the grounds of rational hope that the gift of revelation may perhaps be true. Though Hope may exist upon less substantial nutriment in the way of evidence than Belief, yet Mr. Mill did not intend it in this case to live upon air. And Christ's own account of the origin of his gift is unmistakably designed both here and also at page 255, already quoted, to count for something in the mind of any one who is anxious to hope after the authenticity of Christ's credentials. And this, though we are told at the same time that in pre-scientific ages men always did what Christ did, in attributing to God any unusual faculties of their own.

Apart from this, however, we are perplexed as to the purport of the proposition in the above extract, that what the writer justly calls the extremely precious gift of Christ's moral sayings and the impressiveness of his character, '*though facilitated, was not apparently necessitated by what had gone before,* but was due to the peculiar mental and moral endowments of one man.' But we have been already told (p. 236) that all the knowledge we now possess concerning the history of the human mind tends to the conclusion that the gift of Christianity arose 'by natural development.' Then, if so, what are we to under-

stand by the proposition that it was facilitated, but not apparently necessitated, by antecedent conditions? What other idea of natural development can a scientific thinker have, than one which connects a consequent by way of necessity with its antecedents? And what other idea of a phenomenon being necessitated can a scientific thinker have, than that it arose by natural development? In short, was the appearance of Christ in the world, and was his type of character, free from necessary connection with what had gone before, in any sense in which we might not say with equal truth that the appearance and the character of Socrates, or the appearance and character of Descartes, were free from such necessary connection? Was it so, or not? If it was, what becomes of natural development? If it was not, what is the significance of the distinction between necessity and facility? The effect and purport, not only of this distinction, but of the whole passage in which it occurs (p. 240), are to encourage the believer to hope that the account of Christianity as in some degree due to a supernatural interposition of some kind is a true account. I am not now denying the propriety of this encouragement, nor stating any opinion as to the grounds for it: I am only insisting how profoundly irreconcilable it is with the scientific principles which Mr. Mill elsewhere inculcated, and with passages in the very volume before us.

And let us make one or two remarks with reference to those 'peculiar mental and moral endowments' on which Mr. Mill lays so much stress. No fair-minded man, most certainly not the present writer, can feel any inclination to disparage these in themselves, provided they are not made the basis of conclusions that are too wide for them to bear.

'Whatever else may be taken away from us by rational criticism,' Mr. Mill says, 'Christ is still left; a unique figure, not more

unlike all his precursors than all his followers, even those who had the direct benefit of his personal teaching. It is of no use to say that Christ as exhibited in the Gospels is not historical, and that we know not how much of what is admirable has been superadded by the tradition of his followers. The tradition of followers suffices to insert any number of marvels, and may have inserted all the miracles which he is reputed to have wrought. But who among his disciples or among their proselytes was capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus, or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels? . . . . About the life and sayings of Jesus there is a stamp of personal originality combined with profundity of insight, which, if we abandon the idle expectation of finding scientific precision, where something very different was aimed at, must place the Prophet of Nazareth, even in the estimation of those who have no belief in his inspiration, in the very first rank of the men of sublime genius of whom our species can boast. When this pre-eminent genius is combined with the qualities of probably the greatest moral reformer, and martyr to that mission, who ever existed upon earth, religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity; nor, even now, would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our life' (p. 264).

From all this few persons will feel inclined seriously to dissent, if only we can be sure that we precisely seize the sense in which Mr. Mill means it to be taken. Few persons can be seriously disposed to deny the claims of the Prophet of Nazareth to a place in the very first rank of sublime benefactors of mankind. But it will seem a matter of regret to those who are accustomed to the precision of Mr. Mill's other writings, that he did not here too suggest the proper limitations. They are in this case all the more needful, because common opinion and belief is already drawn by a variety of

most powerful forces to exaggerate the beauty and worth of the character of the central figure in the Christian scheme. Mr. Mill cannot be held responsible for the interpretation which may be unjustly foisted upon his written words. At the same time it would have been well, and what is more, it would only have been consistent with his usual practice, if he had guarded himself against misunderstandings which he could hardly fail to foresee. It is an invidious thing even to seem to disparage a lovely and noble character, but Mr. Mill's excessive panegyric is so sure to be abused, that in common honesty a critic is bound to hint at some warnings against such an abuse. In the first place, the attempt to separate the noble moralities which may be selected from the Gospels, from all the men who had gone before Christ, or who gathered round him, is thoroughly unhistoric. There is not one of the ethical maxims mentioned by Mr. Mill (p. 98) as the imperishable gifts of Christ, which is not in substance to be found before his time. Readers receive so many shocks to their faith in these days, that the impression of any one of them seldom lasts more than a few weeks. Perhaps therefore they have had ample time to forget a shock they received seven years ago. A learned scholar then showed them that the sublimest dicta of the Gospels found exact parallels in the Talmud, and warned them that to assume that the Talmud borrowed from the New Testament would be like assuming that Sanskrit sprang from Latin, or that French was developed from the Norman words found in English. And the wider our knowledge extends, the fainter become the claims made for the Gospel moralities as original, new, or exceptionally profound in insight. The whole mental atmosphere was charged with these moralities. The spirituality of the Judaism of the age in which Christ appeared, was fully as high among the better

sort, as Christ ever succeeded in making it. Can we forget, it has been justly asked, the summary of religion given by Micah, to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God? 'The Jewish synagogues have probably varied in religious attainments as much as Christian churches; but there is no ostensible reason to think that they are indebted to Jesus for any of their spirituality; while ostensibly Jesus must have learnt from them. Rather, they and we and all the world learn from one another and from Time, a richer and richer experience accumulating, while many hearts seek their common Father' (*F. W. Newman*).

Apart from the positive historic evidence against the exalted and absolute isolation in which Mr. Mill insists upon placing the Prophet of Nazareth, is it not contrary to our whole experience that there should be any such prodigious distance in the capacity for noble feeling between a moral teacher drawing souls after him, and the best of those who are so drawn; between a great master in moral things, and the best of his followers? Those whose hearts were touched by his teaching, so that they gave up all and followed him, must already have had within them the stir of the same aspiration, to which he had the gift of imparting such pathetic and attaching expression. The Corinthian vine-dresser, who after reading the *Gorgias* was so mastered by admiration that he forsook his fields and his vines, and fared to Athens and besought Plato to be his teacher, must already have had alive within him the love of virtue for its own sake, before Plato's words thus quickened the germ.

Secondly, the moralities are admitted to be imperfect. We may have the satisfaction of quoting Mr. Mill's own words about the sayings of Christ, that 'they contain and were only meant to contain part of the truth; *many essential elements of*

the highest morality are not provided for, nor attempted to be provided for' (*Liberty*, p. 91). 'Other ethics,' he says, 'than any which can be evolved from exclusively Christian sources, must exist side by side with Christian ethics, to produce the moral regeneration of mankind' (*Ib.* 92). 'Even the Christ of the Gospels,' he says in the second of the essays before us (p. 111), 'holds out the direct promise of reward from heaven as a primary inducement to the noble and beautiful beneficence towards our fellow-creatures which he so impressively inculcates. This is a radical inferiority of the best supernatural religions, compared with the Religion of Humanity.' I will not say that passages like these are logically irreconcilable with the proposition, that it would not be easy to find 'a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our life' (p. 255). But at least such passages make an enormous deduction from the significance of that proposition. And so also do they make an enormous deduction from the value of the possibility of a special, express, and unique mission to lead mankind to truth and virtue—truth and virtue, mark, with 'many essential elements of the highest morality not provided for, nor attempted to be provided for.'

Thirdly, this unconditioned exaltation of the Christ of the Gospels as 'the pattern of perfection for humanity,' as 'the ideal representative and guide,' and so forth, can only be possible to such a moralist as Mr. Mill was, or as any enlightened person of our day must be, by means of a process of selection and arbitrary rejection. We may, no doubt, and many of us do, construct an ideal figure out of the sayings, the life, and the character of the great figure of the Gospels. Mr. Mill's panegyric should remind us that we do this only on

condition of shutting our eyes to about one half of the portraits as drawn in the Gospels. I mean that not merely are some essential elements of the highest morality omitted, but that there are positive injunctions and positive traits recorded, which must detract in the highest degree from the justice of an unqualified eulogium. Mr. Mill allows in one place (p. 98) that the noble moralities of Christ are 'mixed with some poetical exaggerations and some maxims of which it is difficult to ascertain the precise object.' This is far too moderate an account of the matter. There are sayings morally objectionable and superstitious in the highest degree, and we have no more right arbitrarily to shift the discredit of these on to the shoulders of the disciples or narrators, than we have to deny to them all possibility of credit for what is admirable. This however, is a side of the argument which it would perhaps do more harm than good to press.' Even an excessive admiration for a benign and nobly pitiful character is so attractive and so wholesome, that one can have scanty satisfaction in searching for defective traits.

That Mr. Mill should have committed himself to a position which calls for this deprecatory withdrawal from the critic, is one of the puzzles and perplexities of the book. It is astonishing that he should not have seen that his conception of the character of the Prophet of Nazareth was moulded in obedience to his own subjective requirements in the way of ethical beauty, and could only be made to correspond with the objective picture in the Gospel record by means of an arbitrary suppression of some of the most remarkable sayings and striking traits. It is a process in fashion. Human experience has widened; many narrow superstitions have dropped off; the notion of right and duty has been impregnated with new ingredients; the ideal has changed. Then we proceed to the

anachronism of fastening the new ideal on our favourite figures of antique days, without regard either to obvious historic conditions, or to the plain and unmistakable letter of the antique record. 'One of the hardest burdens,' as Mr. Mill says, 'laid upon the other good influences of human nature, has been that of improving religion itself' (p. 75). Let us carefully abstain then from falsifying the history of the development of human nature by imputing, either to the religion of the past, or to their founders, perfections of which it is historically impossible that either one or the other should have been possessed. Let us not assume that Christ was so infinitely 'over the heads of his reporters,' to use Mr. Arnold's phrase, and then proceed to construct an arbitrary anthology of sayings, which we choose to accept as Christ's on the strength of this assumption. It were surely more consonant with intelligence of method to content ourselves with tracing in Christ, as in the two or three other great teachers of the world who are hardly beneath him in psychagogic efficacy, such words and traits as touch our spiritual sense and fit in with the later and more mature perceptions of the modern time. And why should we not do this without fretting against discords in act or speech, that were only to be expected from the conditions; and still more without straining our own intelligence, and coercing the record into yielding us a picture of transcendent and impossible faultlessness?

Let us now proceed to examine the idea of an Intelligent Mind, working under conditions only partially modifiable, and animated by a certain measure of benevolence. Our first remark is upon the arbitrary character of the idea of limiting the Creator's power. It is in this case an interpretation of the facts of the universe invented for the purpose of saving the Creator's moral goodness. 'Nor, then, can God,' says Plato,

'since he is good, be the author of all things, as people commonly say, but only of a few of the things that occur to men; and for many things he is not responsible; for far fewer are the goods of human life than its evils, and it is the good only that we are to set down to him; for the evil we must seek any cause rather than God.'[1] Now if it is indispensable that we should think of the deity as clothed with attributes which are essential elements of human morality, this theory of him as partially responsible would in so far meet the difficulty. And in the next place, if it is indispensable that we should praise and worship the deity, clearly we must impute to him those moral qualities which we praise and admire in the best types of our own species. Mr. Mill has rendered no greater service to morals than by his denunciation, first, in a memorable declamatory passage in the volume on Hamilton, and now in many energetic passages in the volume before us, of the practice of offering homage and flattery to a person whom in the same liturgy we treat as having the most iniquitous of imaginable characters. If the deity is not good in the same sense as men are said to be good, then it is a depraving mockery to make morality consist in doing his will, and to chant litanies expressive of our deep sense how good he is.

But it is conceivable that the world may have been created by a Being who is not good, not pitiful, not benevolent, not just; a Being no more entitled to our homage or worship, than Francesco Cenci was entitled to the filial piety of his unhappy children. Why not? Morality concerns the conduct and relations of human beings, and of them only. We cannot know, nor indeed does it seem easy to believe, that the principles which cover the facts of social relationship, must therefore be adequate to guide or explain the motions of a

[1] *Republic*, bk. ii. p. 379: Οὐδ' ἄρα ὁ θεός, κ. τ. λ.

Demiurgus, holding the universal ordering in the hollow of his hand. To insist on rejecting any theory of creation which forbids us to predicate anything of the Creator in terms of morality, seems as unphilosophical as to insist on rejecting the evolutional theory of the origin of the human species, on the ground that it robs man of his nobility and dignity. If any one feels bound to praise and worship the Creator, he is bound to invest the object of his worship with praiseworthy attributes. But a philosopher is not bound to do anything except to explain the facts. Our first objection then to Mr. Mill's permissive explanation of the facts by a limitation of creative power, is that it springs from a sentiment which is out of place in an inquiry that claims to be scientific.

Paley admitted the possibility of the same kind of explanation on a different ground. 'Contrivance,' he said, 'by its very definition and nature, is the refuge of imperfection. Why resort to contrivance where power is omnipotent?' He answered this by saying that it is only by the display of contrivance that the existence, the agency, the wisdom of the Deity could be testified to his rational creatures. So 'God has been pleased to prescribe limits to his own power, and to work his ends within those limits.'[1] The difference between

[1] Paley's *Natural Theology*, ch. iii. The passage concludes thus:—'As we have said, therefore, God prescribes limits to his power, that he may let in the exercise, and thereby exhibit demonstrations, of his wisdom. For then, *i.e.* such laws and limitations being laid down, it is as though one Being should have fixed certain rules; and, if we may so speak, provided certain materials; and, afterwards, have committed to another Being, out of these materials, and in subordination to these rules, the task of drawing forth a creation; a supposition which evidently leaves room, and induces indeed a necessity, for contrivance. Nay, there may be many such agents, and many ranks of these. We do not advance this as a doctrine either of philosophy or of religion; but we say that the subject may safely be represented under this view; because the Deity, acting himself by general laws, will have the same consequences

Mr. Mill's idea and Paley's (both Paley and Mr. Mill are content to rank it as a more or less plausible hypothesis) is that the latter hypothetically conceives God as voluntarily fixing bounds to his own power, for the sake of proving his own existence to men, while the former hypothetically conceives him as struggling with intractable matter and its stubborn conditions. Mr. Mill's idea is simply that of the *Timæus*, of which Mr. Grote's account will suffice. 'The Demiurgus of Plato is not conceived as a Creator, but as a Constructor or Artist. . . . He represents provident intelligence or art, and beneficent purpose, contending with a force superior and irresistible, so as to improve it so far as it will allow itself to be improved. . . . The genesis of the Kosmos thus results from a combination of intelligent force with the original primordial Necessity, which was persuaded, and consented to have its irregular agency regularised up to a certain point, but no further. Beyond this limit the systematizing arrangements of the Demiurgus could not be carried; but all that is good or beautiful in the Kosmos was owing to them.' [1]

In short, each of these hypotheses is as arbitrary as the rest, and we are hardly to be blamed for having expected that the last word of the great positive thinker of our day would have been a warning to people to remember how arbitrary all such hypotheses must be, and a clear-voiced counsel to abandon them. And the surprise with which Mr. Mill's countenance to such a hypothesis affects us, is all the greater because in an earlier passage he speaks of the evidence for it as 'shadowy

upon our reasoning, as if he had prescribed these laws to another. It has been said that the problem of creation was, "attraction and matter being given, to make a world out of them;" and, as above explained, this statement perhaps does not convey a false idea.'

[1] Grote's *Plato*, iii. pp. 248–9.

and unsubstantial.' He is doubtful even whether it can be called evidence at all (p. 117).

Next, when we are told that such evidence as there is points to the arrangement of the present order of the universe by an Intelligent Mind, what are we to understand by an Intelligent Mind? Surely this is to define the supernatural in terms of the natural, the Unknowable in terms of the Known. It is a sublimation of anthropomorphism, but it is essentially anthropomorphic. Mind is no individual and integral entity. It is an abstract term, conveniently invented to describe a set of complex psychological energies. It comprehends reason, volition, appetite, affection, and as many subdivisions as the ingenuity of psychologists may form. They do not call them material phenomena, but they are phenomena which we only find objectively united in a material synthesis. No scientific psychologist can realise the occurrence of a mental operation without a corresponding change in structure. In the case of the individual man, what scientific person seriously thinks that his mind (*i.e.* a set of complex energies) is something with an independent objective existence, external to his body? Mind is a general conception, an abstract idea, like motion or heat, and any one who ascribes to it the position of an independent entity, existing apart from the phenomenal conditions in which only we know it, has no right to laugh at Plato's doctrine of archetypal Ideas. To talk of a Mind without a personality attached to it, as the framer of the Kosmos, is every bit as unmeaning as it was in Pythagoras to fix on Number for the ruling power of the universe. And the moment you attempt to attach elements of personality to this mere name and empty abstraction, there is no reason why man should not forthwith proceed to make God after his own image. If you attach personality to this Intelligent Mind, it can only be a finer

version of the rude anthropomorphism of the fetishist. If you do not, then the notion of a bare Mind, or a bare Will, busying itself over the Kosmos, is to me as utterly without meaning, as the old theory of the universe being generated by Contradictories. It was scarcely worth while to forsake the jingle of the Athanasian Creed, if we are still to find ourselves invited to give a nominally intelligent adherence to another form of the Uncreate and Incomprehensible, the reasonable soul without human flesh subsisting.

My second objection, then, to Mr. Mill's probability of creation by an Intelligent Mind is that it implies the transformation of an abstract name for certain attributes of animals into a superhuman causative agency. And I will venture to lend authoritative support to this objection by a quotation from Mr. Mill himself. 'It would, no doubt,' he says in the work upon Hamilton, 'be absurd to assume that our words exhaust the possibilities of Being. There may be innumerable modes of it which are inaccessible to our faculties, and which consequently we are unable to name. But we ought not to speak of these modes of Being by any of the names we possess. These are all inapplicable, because they all stand for known modes of Being. We might invent new names for such unknown modes, but the new names would have no more meaning than the x, y, z of Algebra. The only name we can give them which really expresses an attribute is the word Unknowable.'[1] It is impossible to contend that an impersonal Mind brooding over inorganic and rigidly conditioned Matter is a known mode of Being, and we have therefore no right to predicate anything of such a force—if it be a force—except Unknowableness.

Mr. Mill, however, finds some evidence for another attribute

[1] *Examination of Sir W. Hamilton's Philosophy*, p. 14, 3rd edit.

besides Intelligence in this supernatural Mind—namely a partial measure of Benevolence. If this be so, most of the tremendous indictment against Nature (which the reader will find in the first essay) must assuredly be considered as cancelled and abandoned. 'It does appear,' Mr. Mill now says, 'that granting the existence of design, there is a preponderance of evidence that the Creator desired the pleasure of his creatures.'

'This is indicated by the fact that pleasure of one description or another is afforded by almost everything, the mere play of the faculties, physical and mental, being a never-ending source of pleasure, and even painful things giving pleasure by the satisfaction of curiosity and the agreeable sense of acquiring knowledge; and also that pleasure, when experienced, seems to result from the normal working of the machinery, while pain usually arises from some external interference with it, and resembles in each particular case the result of an accident. Even in cases when pain results, like pleasure, from the machinery itself, the appearances do not indicate that contrivance was brought into play purposely to produce pain: what is indicated is rather a clumsiness in the contrivance employed for some other purpose. The author of the machinery is no doubt accountable for having made it susceptible of pain; but this may have been a necessary condition of its susceptibility to pleasure; a supposition which avails nothing on the theory of an Omnipotent Creator, but is an extremely probable one in the case of a contriver working under the limitation of inexorable laws and indestructible properties of matter. The susceptibility being conceded as a thing which did enter into design, the pain itself usually seems like a thing undesigned; a casual result of the collision of the organism with some outward force to which it was not intended to be exposed, and which, in many cases, provision is even made to hinder it from being exposed to. There is, therefore, much appearance that pleasure is agreeable to the Creator, while there is very little if any appearance that pain is so:

and there is a certain amount of justification for inferring, on grounds of Natural Theology alone, that benevolence is one of the attributes of the Creator' (p. 191).

What then becomes of the strength of the proposition that 'even when Nature does not intend to kill, she inflicts the same tortures in apparent wantonness?' If anything shows contrivance, it would seem to be the arrangements for reproduction. Why should we allow that 'there is very little if any appearance that pain is agreeable to the Creator,' who is supposed to have designed this contrivance, if the following lines be true:—'In the clumsy provision which she [*i.e.* Nature] has made for that perpetual renewal of animal life, rendered necessary by the prompt termination she puts to it in every individual instance, no human being ever comes into the world but another human being is literally stretched on the rack for hours or days, not unfrequently issuing in death' (p. 30)? Nothing can be more arbitrary than this attribution of all the pains to Nature, and all the pleasure to the Demiurgus. How can we apply to the process of birth such propositions as that the pain arises from external interference with the normal working of the machinery, and resembles an accident; that the pain seems like a thing undesigned; that it is a casual result of the collision of the organism with some outward force to which it was not intended to be exposed? And the same difficulties arise in connection with some other functions and liabilities of the body, to which I will not more specially refer. Both in these and all other cases, the partition of the phenomena of animal and vegetable life between Nature and an Intelligent Mind, between a tyrannic Zeus and a beneficent Prometheus, and the attribution of all the good to one, and all the ill to the other, is tainted with arbitrariness and anthropomorphism from beginning to end. It is irrecon-

cilable with that idea of Nature as a vast unity, a Whole of continuous processes, which the discoveries of science are every day pressing more irresistibly upon the minds of men, as the true conception of the universe of which we are pygmy constituents.

One or two remarks may be made here upon Mr. Mill's modified acceptance of the argument from Design. 'I think it must be allowed,' he says, 'that in the present state of our knowledge, the adaptations in Nature afford a large balance of probability in favour of creation by intelligence.' To begin with, one cannot help feeling that Mr. Mill's reasoning on this critical point in the discussion loses greatly in interest, from the circumstance that it does not grapple with the most important scientific hypothesis of our time—a hypothesis which, if it can ever be completely verified, will make short work with the evidence from which Mr. Mill's balance of probability is procured. Mr. Mill, with his invariable candour, admits that the Darwinian theory, the principle of the Survival of the Fittest, while 'in no way whatever inconsistent with Creation,' still would undoubtedly 'greatly attenuate the evidence for it' (p. 174). It would be ungracious to make too much of the omission to deal at length with this great dominant hypothesis. It must, however, be said that a treatise whose main positive proposition is that Nature furnishes appearances of design and contrivance by an Intelligent Mind or Will, and yet fails to reconcile that proposition with the principle of modification by natural selection, has not encountered the central problem. In face of the Darwinian hypothesis, with the immense mass of evidence already accumulated in its favour, the inference from contrivance exists, to say the best of it, in a state of suspended animation.

There is another discovery of modern science, which, taken

together with the corollaries belonging to it, reduces the evidence from certain special nice and intricate combinations in organic nature to a still weaker quality. I mean the principle of the Persistence of Force and the Transformation and Equivalence of Forces. The explanation of the distribution of matter to which this law points, if it does not finally exclude the idea of a designer or contriver sedulously inventing adaptations, at least makes a terrible deduction from the small balance of probability which was all that Mr. Mill left us, after making the other deductions which he found necessary. Mr. Mill justly admits that 'signs of contrivance are most conspicuous in the structure and processes of vegetable and animal life,' while 'similar though less conspicuous marks of creation are recognised in inorganic Nature' (p. 188). Now the evidence is daily growing more irresistible to the minds of the most competent observers, that the law of the transforming process in the phenomena of inorganic, no less than of organic nature, has been one and the same. The quantity of force in the universe is a constant quantity; its metamorphosis takes place over the whole field of concrete phenomena in obedience to uniform laws. The Kosmos is one and integral. Its component parts may be grouped into various divisions for our convenience, astronomic, biologic, organic, inorganic, animal, vegetable; but they are all alike manifestations of one fundamental and all-pervading process. 'A Power of which the nature remains for ever inconceivable, and to which no limits in Time or Space can be imagined, works in us certain effects. These effects have certain likenesses of kind, the most general of which we class together under the names of Matter, Motion, and Force; and between these effects there are likenesses of connection, the most constant of which we class as laws of the highest certainty. Analysis reduces these several kinds of

effect to one kind of effect; and these several kinds of uniformity to one kind of uniformity. And the highest achievement of Science is the interpretation of all orders of phenomena as differently conditioned manifestations of this one kind of effect, under differently conditioned modes of this one kind of uniformity.'[1] Whatever value we may choose to set upon any special way of working out the theory of cosmic evolution, we can hardly be blind either to the evidence there is for its general truth, or to the force with which that evidence makes against the notion of special contrivance and provident adaptation. The scientific principles which lead to the doctrine of Evolution, are not logically inconsistent with Theism. But they are inconsistent with the inference of a creative deity from any of the supposed phenomena of Design.

Lastly, upon this part of the subject, I would urge that Mr. Mill has not said anything, in dealing with the argument from design, to weaken the following strong and now familiar objection to all forms of that argument; namely, that it implies a transfer to regions beyond experience, of an idea which springs from experience and is limited by it. We derive from practical experience the notion that contrivance must come from a contriving intelligence—that is to say, from one or more human beings exercising their faculties with a view to procuring a given end. Let us put aside the objection to inferring a *nisus formativus* from a *nexus formativus*. Let us grant the proposition in which Mr. Mill widens and fortifies the older statement of the Design argument: let us grant that considerations properly inductive establish that there is some connection through causation between the origin of the arrangements of nature and the ends they fulfil. This does not entitle us to proceed to attribute this causative association to an Intelligent

[1] Spencer's *First Principles*, p. 557.

Mind or Will. We know from experience that, in the case of the products of human ingenuity, the result may be traced to a provident intention in a man. But how can we infer from this that non-human adaptations are to be traced to a provident intention in—— In what? We cannot complete the sentence. Whatever word we may choose must be a word directly or indirectly of human experience, and to use it would be to transport the ideas of natural agency into a region where the agency is supernatural.

To turn for a moment to Mr. Mill's treatment of the question of the Immortality of the Soul. His conclusion on this subject is that, if we admit the ordering of the world to be the work of an Intelligent Mind, who sometimes appears to desire the happiness of human creatures, there is no reason why the same Intelligence should not intend human consciousness to be prolonged after the dissolution of the body. Of course to one who denies the alleged evidence for Creation—or the alleged inferences of the benevolence of the Demiurgus—this chain of reasoning, only potential and contingent as it is, breaks asunder. Mr. Mill, however, deals also with the question from the point of view of those indications of immortality which are independent of any theory respecting the Creator and his intentions. His conclusion on this side of the matter is that there is really a total absence of evidence either way; and that the absence of evidence for the affirmative does not, as in so many cases it does, create a strong presumption in favour of the negative (p. 203). There is no evidence in science against the immortality of the soul, but that negative evidence which consists in the absence of evidence in its favour (201). Now how far is this really so? Mr. Mill states the case of those who resist the common doctrine thus:—'The evidence is

well-nigh complete that all thought and feeling has some action of the bodily organism for its immediate antecedent or accompaniment; that the specific variations, and especially the different degree of complication of the nervous and cerebral organization, correspond to differences in the development of the mental faculties; and though we have no evidence, except negative, that the mental consciousness ceases for ever when the functions of the brain are at an end, we do know that diseases of the brain disturb the mental functions, and that decay or weakness of the brain enfeebles them. We have therefore sufficient evidence that cerebral action is, if not the cause, at least, in our present state of existence, a condition *sine quâ non* of mental operations; and that assuming the mind to be a distinct substance, its separation from the body would not be, as some have vainly flattered themselves, a liberation from trammels and restoration to freedom, but would simply put a stop to its functions and remand it to unconsciousness, unless and until some other set of conditions supervenes, capable of recalling it into activity, but of the existence of which experience does not give us the smallest indication' (p. 198.)

'The relation of thought to a material brain,' however, he warns us, 'is no metaphysical necessity, but simply a constant co-existence within the limits of observation.'

Now without presuming to discuss so far-reaching a problem at the end of an essay, I may suggest for consideration whether Mr. Mill's account of the matter is adequate. It has all the marks common to every approach to this question from the Idealistic side. Must we leave it where he leaves it in the remark last quoted? Is that group of attributes which we call the mind or soul a consequence of bodily organization? Biology, not psychology, is the field in which we should seek for an

answer. The effect of such evidence as we have on this side is understated by Mr. Mill. We know more than that cerebral action is an indispensable condition of mental operations. This would only show a constant co-existence of mental energies with affections of the bodily organism. We have to add to that the result of the Method of Concomitancy of Variation. Administer a narcotic; the stream of thinking and feeling is suspended. Take alcohol: the mental faculties are stimulated. Take it in excess: their power of co-ordination gradually disappears. Certain drugs fill the mind of the person addicted to them with special and absorbing images. Obvious facts of this sort might be multiplied without end out of the daily experience of all of us. The canon of the Method of Concomitant Variations is this (Mr. Mill's *Logic*, bk. III., ch. viii. § 6):—'Whatever phenomenon varies in any manner whenever another phenomenon varies in some particular manner, is either a cause or an effect of that phenomenon, or is connected with it through some fact of causation.' And the writer explains as to the last clause, that it is inserted for the following reason. Two phenomena might accompany one another in their variation, without the one necessarily being the cause of the other; they might both be different effects of some common cause. How are we to tell which is the proper solution of a given case of concomitancy of variation? The only way to solve the doubt, he tells us, is to endeavour to ascertain whether we can produce the one set of variations by means of the other.

If Mr. Mill's canon above quoted be sound, if we follow out this method fully, we shall surely see reason for thinking that cerebral action is truly the cause, and not merely 'a condition *sine quâ non*' of mental operations. The facts of mental pathology are tantamount to a series of experiments performed

by Nature herself. Cerebral inflammation produces a mental delirium; makes the soul delirious, if you choose to express it so. Cerebral malformation makes the soul idiotic. Comparative anatomy in the same manner serves the purpose of experiment by 'varying the circumstances,' as Bacon bade us do. The soul, or in plainer English, the intellectual and emotional faculties of the whole set of animal species, is quantitatively and qualitatively related to the size and structure of the cerebral hemispheres and their contents.

Mr. Mill says that science does not prove experimentally that any mode of organization has the power of producing feeling or thought, and that to make this proof good 'it would be necessary that we should be able to produce an organization, and try whether it would feel' (p. 198). I am aware that it may be denied that in the case of narcotics, stimulants and the rest, we are artificially producing the antecedents of mental variations; such cases may be described as 'merely setting in motion the exact process by which nature produces them.' Even however if the above argument from concomitancy of variations should be deemed insufficient experimental proof to be worth taking into account, I fail to see why the method of Observation should be left out of sight. Observation, if aided by correct deduction, is not confined to the mere ascertaining of sequences and co-existences. It is able to establish causation. This being so, and considering the tenor of the propositions which observation and deduction are gradually building up with an ever increasing force and significance, I submit that Mr. Mill's remarks on the evidence as to the relations between soul and body involve a distinct understatement.

To return to the main line of argument. Of course it will be said that in this parenthesis we are reasoning from inductions of experience to a region which, *ex hypothesi*, lies wholly

outside of experience. Mr. Mill would have admitted that the line of objection we have taken would be final as against the intrusion of a disembodied spirit into our own region of observation; as, for instance, seems to be implied in the affirmations of the Spiritualists. But this objection, he would say, amounts to nothing more than a faint presumption, when directed against the hypothesis of a prolonged mental existence under wholly other conditions. Even if, it might be said, mind within the limits of our observation does directly depend on bodily conditions, it may still, beyond them, depend on quite another cause (according to the doctrine of Plurality of Causes).

That is so. We deny none of these propositions. We admit that it is illegitimate to infer from the invariable concomitance of a phenomenon with *one* set of conditions, that no other set of conditions is capable of taking their place. And we admit that we cannot *disprove* the possibility of what is called the immortality of the soul. But then no more can we disprove any other proposition whatever, that anybody may choose to make as to regions outside of our own experience. Nor can any presumption of probability lie for or against any such proposition. There is no measure nor standard for such a region. No belief about the conditions of a world beyond our experience is more extravagant or irrational than any other. You have no more logical right to laugh at any detail of life in Walhalla or the Happy Hunting Grounds, than we have to laugh at the vague shadow-land in which the modern believer hopes one day to find his own personality in some shape or other. Whatever force the section on Immortality may possess, that force would be exactly as great, if in every place where Immortality is used, we choose to substitute Metempsychosis. When controversialists are disposed to use Mr. Mill's essay as a weapon against those who doubt the immortality of the soul, they will

do well to remember that it is exactly as strong a weapon against those who doubt the Transmigration of the soul.

And Mr. Mill's warnings would be just as much in place and just as efficient in the mouth of a defender of the Trinity or the Real Presence. As God lies outside of our experience (see the Athanasian Creed), as his conditions are wholly extra-human, how can we know the impossibility of incorporation in the sacred wafer? Why should we think tri-unity less or more likely than unity? All propositions about the dwellers in the heavens are exactly on the same level of credibility.

The line of argument followed in pp. 200–3, is extremely important from the Idealist side. It is substantially identical with the passage in Berkeley on the Natural Immortality of the Soul (*Of the Principles of Human Knowledge*, § 141). There is even nothing in Mr. Mill's way of handling this question inconsistent with a passage quoted by Professor Fraser from one of Berkeley's letters:—'Now it seems very easy to conceive the soul to exist in a separate state, and to exercise herself on new ideas, without the intervention of those tangible things which we call bodies. It is even very possible to conceive how the soul may have ideas of colour without an eye, or of sound without an ear.' This is expressed by Mr. Mill as follows:—'Experience furnishes us with no example of any series of states of consciousness without this group of contingent sensations attached to it; but *it is as easy to imagine such a series of states without, as with, this accompaniment*, and we know of no reason in the nature of things against the possibility of its being thus disjoined. We may suppose that the same thoughts, emotions, volitions, and even sensations which we have here, may persist or recommence somewhere else under other conditions, just as much as we may suppose that other thoughts and sensations may exist under other conditions in other parts of the universe.'

Nobody would say of all this that it is false, but only that it is idle. It would apply equally well to all human knowledge. It would equally well serve to nullify our conclusion upon the properties of all other kinds of matter, as it is here used to nullify our conclusions from the phenomena of cerebral matter. The line of ontological argument taken by Mr. Mill here no more damages propositions reducing mental operations to functions of a physical organism, than it damages propositions connecting heat and light and growth with the sun. There may be a universe in which heat and light produce themselves without a sun. If people choose to think much about such a universe, there is no logic to prevent them. But is it not more worthy of rational persons to confine their beliefs to the region of propositions that can be verified? It would have been impossible for a thinker of Mr. Mill's calibre and discipline to maintain the contrary of this: and, indeed, he goes even beyond this, for he speaks (p. 244) of the 'rational principle of regulating our *feelings as well as opinions* strictly by evidence.'

This brings us to what is perhaps the most interesting, if it is not the least surprising, vein of sentiment that the book contains. Mr. Mill opens the question whether it is a departure from the rational principle that we have just stated, to indulge in a hope in the region of imagination merely, in which there is no prospect that any probable grounds of expectation will ever be obtained. For himself, he confesses that it seems to him 'that the indulgence of hope with regard to the government of the universe and the destiny of man after death, while we recognise as a clear truth that we have no ground for more than a hope, is legitimate and philosophically defensible.' He reaches this state of mind on the following grounds: As positive beliefs

respecting states of existence superior to the human become weakened, the imagination is left less provided with material from the domain of supposed reality, for employment on the higher things. But human life stands greatly in need, and will never cease to stand in need, 'of any wider range and greater height of aspiration for itself and its destination, which the exercise of imagination can yield to it without running counter to the evidence of fact.' Do we not prize, and rightly prize, a cheerful disposition? Yet what is that but a disposition that habitually chooses to dwell on the brighter possibilities? The literal truth of facts is not the only thing to be considered in the culture and regulation of the imagination. On the contrary, to live in the habitual contemplation of gloomy, mean, or base facts of human life, however true and real, makes it impossible to keep up in one's self a high tone of mind; the imagination and feelings become toned to a lower pitch; the poetry is taken out of the things that would otherwise be fullest of it. What we ought to do, is to lead our imagination to turn habitually to those facts, and possibilities of facts, which increase happiness and elevate character; and this we can do, while at the same time we take care that imagination shall not disturb the rectitude of the intellect or the right direction of the actions and will. 'When the Reason is strongly cultivated, the imagination may safely follow its own end, and do its best to make life pleasant and lovely inside the castle, in reliance on the fortifications raised and maintained by reason round the outward bounds' (244-9).

If we view this remarkable passage as a contribution towards giving to the cultivation of the imagination its right place in human education, it may be said that its writer has seldom penned a more suggestive and fruitful page.[1] How deplorable

[1] See also *Autobiography*, p. 151.

to think that almost the only field in which the imagination of the vast majority of the human race has been, or is, systematically stimulated and nourished, is the sterile region of a fantastic theology. Only think, for instance, of such culture of the imagination as produces the religion of a Neapolitan peasant or that of an American Shaker. With reference to the special conclusion which this passage is designed to illustrate, we will only make one or two short remarks. And, first, there is a very great danger of what Mr. Mill reduces to a vague and shadowy hope, pretty rapidly stiffening itself into a distinct belief. As the only recommendation of the hope, on Mr. Mill's principles, is that it may perhaps be useful in comforting and elevating people, there is a very serious drawback indeed to this recommendation, if we have reason to believe that most persons will at once proceed to transform a legitimate hope of a shadowy possibility into an illegitimate belief of a strong and definite probability, or even a downright certainty. There may be comforts which the world is so sure to abuse, that it is perhaps wiser to put them aside and to look about for other solaces, which would answer the purpose at least as well, and which are less open to mischievous perversion. Why shall I permit myself, or encourage others, to flee for refreshment of soul to the narcotics and intoxicants of mysticism, when we can acquire at least as ample an enlargement of spirit, at least as rich a quickening of human sympathies, and at least as lofty a sphere for the broodings and the flights of our imaginations, by meditating on the experience of the race, on the passions, the efforts, the destinies of man on the earth, and on the amazing sublimity and beauty, the vastness and force, of the wide universe in which man is placed?

We are not now saying that this is a religion or a substitute for one, and perhaps it cannot be made into such a substitute.

But it is quite as effective a substitute as the imaginative decoration which Mr. Mill's theory provides, if imaginative decorations to life and stimulus to high character are to replace the theological dogmas of which they are a pale and etiolated version. And sources of solace and elevation strictly confined within the limits of the facts and probabilities of human experience, are more and more likely to gain acceptance into the region of hope and imagination and the feelings, no less than into that of reason and belief; not because the dogmas which Mr. Mill reduces to hopes will have been disproved, but because men's minds will have acquired so invincible a bias in other directions, that these will have utterly ceased to interest them, whether as dogmatic affirmation of facts or as blanched hopes of possibilities.

ON POPULAR CULTURE.

ON POPULAR CULTURE.

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE TOWN HALL, BIRMINGHAM (OCTOBER 5, 1876), BY THE WRITER, AS PRESIDENT OF THE MIDLAND INSTITUTE.

THE proceedings which have now been brought satisfactorily to an end, are of a kind which nobody who has sensibility as well as sense can take a part in without some emotion. An illustrious French philosopher who happened to be an examiner of candidates for admission to the Polytechnic School, once confessed that, when a youth came before him eager to do his best, competently taught, and of an apt intelligence, he needed all his self-control to press back the tears from his eyes. Well, when we think how much industry, patience, and intelligent discipline; how many hard hours of self-denying toil; how many temptations to worthless pleasures resisted; how much steadfast feeling for things that are honest and true and of good report—are all represented by the young men and young women to whom I have had the honour of giving your prizes to-night, we must all feel our hearts warmed and gladdened in generous sympathy with so much excellence, so many good hopes, and so honourable a display of those qualities which make life better worth having for ourselves, and are so likely to make the world better worth living in for those who are to come after us.

If a prize-giving is always an occasion of lively satisfaction, my own satisfaction is all the greater at this moment, because your Institute, which is doing such good work in the world,

and is in every respect so prosperous and so flourishing, is the creation of the people of your own district, without subsidy and without direction either from London, or from Oxford, or from Cambridge, or from any other centre whatever. Nobody in this town at any rate needs any argument of mine to persuade him that we can only be sure of advancing all kinds of knowledge, and developing our national life in all its plenitude and variety, on condition of multiplying these local centres both of secondary and higher education, and encouraging each of them to fight its own battle, and do its work in its own way. For my own part I look with the utmost dismay at the concentration, not only of population, but of the treasures of instruction, in our vast city on the banks of the Thames. At Birmingham, as I am informed, one has not far to look for an example of this. One of the branches of your multifarious trades in this town is the manufacture of jewellery. Some of it is said commonly to be wanting in taste, elegance, skill; though some of it also—if I am not misinformed—is good enough to be passed off at Rome and at Paris, even to connoisseurs, as of Roman or French production. Now the nation possesses a most superb collection of all that is excellent and beautiful in jewellers' work. When I say that the nation possesses it, I mean that London possesses it. The University of Oxford, by the way, has also purchased a portion, but that is not at present accessible. If one of your craftsmen in that kind wants to profit by these admirable models, he must go to London. What happens is that he goes to the capital and stays there. Its superficial attractions are too strong for him. You lose a clever workman and a citizen, and he adds one more atom to that huge, overgrown, and unwieldy community. Now, why, in the name of common-sense, should not a portion of the Castellani collection pass six months of the year in

Birmingham, the very place of all others where it is most likely to be of real service, and to make an effective mark on the national taste?[1]

To pass on to the more general remarks which you are accustomed to expect from the President of the Institute on this occasion. When I consulted one of your townsmen as to the subject which he thought would be most useful and most interesting to you, he said: 'Pray talk about anything you please, if it is only not Education.' There is a saying that there are two kinds of foolish people in the world, those who give advice, and those who do not take it. My friend and I in this matter represent these two interesting divisions of the race, for in spite of what he said, it is upon Education after all

[1] Sir Henry Cole, C.B., writes to the *Times* (Oct. 13) on this suggestion as follows:—'In justice to the Lords President of the Council on Education, I hope you will allow me the opportunity of stating that from 1855 the Science and Art Department has done its very utmost to induce schools of art to receive deposits of works of art for study and popular examination, and to circulate its choicest objects useful to manufacturing industry. In corroboration of this assertion, please to turn to p. 435 of the twenty-second Report of the Department, just issued. You will there find that upwards of 26,907 objects of art, besides 23,911 paintings and drawings, have been circulated since 1855, and in some cases have been left for several months for exhibition in the localities. They have been seen by more than 6,000,000 of visitors, besides having been copied by students, etc., and the localities have taken the great sum of £116,182 for showing them.

'The Department besides has tried every efficient means to induce other public institutions, which are absolutely choked with superfluous specimens, to concur in a general principle of circulating the nation's works of art, but without success.

'The chief of our national storehouses of works of art actually repudiates the idea that its objects are collected for purposes of education, and declares that they are only "things rare and curious," the very reverse of what common-sense says they are.

'Further, the Department, to tempt Schools of Art to acquire objects permanently for art museums attached to them, offered a grant in aid of 50 per cent. of the cost price of the objects.'

that I propose to offer you some short observations. You will believe it no affectation on my part, when I say that I shall do so with the sincerest willingness to be corrected by those of wider practical experience in teaching. I am well aware, too, that I have very little that is new to say, but education is one of those matters on which much that has already been said, will long bear saying over and over again.

I have been looking through the Report of your classes, and two things have rather struck me, which I will mention. One of them is the very large attendance in the French classes. This appears a singularly satisfactory thing, because you could scarcely do a hard-working man of whatever class a greater service than to give him easy access to French literature. Montesquieu used to say that he had never known a pain or distress which he could not soothe by half an hour of a good book; and perhaps it is no more of an exaggeration to say that a man who can read French with comfort need never have a dull hour. Our own literature has assuredly many a kingly name. In boundless riches and infinite imaginative variety, there is no rival to Shakespeare in the world; in energy and height and majesty Milton and Burke have no masters. But besides its great men of this loftier sort, France has a long list of authors who have produced a literature whose chief mark is its agreeableness. As has been so often said, the genius of the French language is its clearness, firmness, and order; to this clearness certain circumstances in the history of French society have added the delightful qualities of liveliness in union with urbanity. Now as one of the most important parts of popular education is to put people in the way of amusing and refreshing themselves in a rational rather than an irrational manner, it is a great gain to have given them the key to the most amusing and refreshing set of books in the world.

And here, perhaps, I may be permitted to remark that it seems a pity that Racine is so constantly used as a school-book, instead of some of the moderns who are nearer to ourselves in ideas and manners. Racine is a great and admirable writer; but what you want for ordinary readers who have not much time, and whose faculties of attention are already largely exhausted by the more important industry of the day, is a book which brings literature more close to actual life than such a poet as Racine does. This is exactly one of the gifts and charms of modern French. To put what I mean very shortly, I would say, by way of illustration, that a man who could read the essays of Ste. Beuve with moderate comfort would have in his hands—of course I am now speaking of the active and busy part of the world, not of bookmen and students—would, I say, have in his hands one of the very best instruments that I can think of; such work is exquisite and instructive in itself, it is a model of gracious writing, it is full of ideas, it breathes the happiest moods over us, and it is the most suggestive of guides, for those who have the capacity of extensive interests, to all the greater spheres of thought and history.

This word brings me back to the second fact that has struck me in your Report, and it is this. The subject of English history has apparently so little popularity, that the class is as near being a failure as anything connected with the Midland Institute can be. On the whole, whatever may be the ability and the zeal of the teacher, this is in my humble judgment neither very surprising nor particularly mortifying, if we think what history in the established conception of it means. How are we to expect workmen to make their way through constitutional antiquities, through the labyrinthine shifts of party intrigue at home, and through the entanglements of

intricate diplomacy abroad—"shallow village tales," as Emerson calls them? These studies are fit enough for professed students of the special subject, but such exploration is for the ordinary run of men and women impossible, and I do not know that it would lead them into very fruitful lands even if it were easy. You know what the great Duke of Marlborough said: that he had learnt all the history he ever knew out of Shakespeare's historical plays. I have long thought that if we persuaded those classes who have to fight their own little Battles of Blenheim for bread every day, to make such a beginning of history as is furnished by Shakespeare's plays and Scott's novels, we should have done more to imbue them with a real interest in the past of mankind, than if we had taken them through a course of Hume and Smollett, or Hallam on the English Constitution, or even the dazzling Macaulay. What I for one should like to see in such an institution as this, would be an attempt to compress the whole history of England into a dozen or fifteen lectures—lectures of course accompanied by catechetical instruction. I am not so extravagant as to dream that a short general course of this kind would be enough to go over so many of the details as it is desirable for men to know, but details in popular instruction, though not in study of the writer or the university professor, are only important after you have imparted the largest general truths. It is the general truths that stir a life-like curiosity as to the particulars which they are the means of lighting up. Now this short course would be quite enough to present in a bold outline—and it need not be a whit the less true and real for being both bold and rapid—the great chains of events and the decisive movements, that have made of ourselves and our institutions what we and what they are—the Teutonic beginnings, the Conquest, the Great Charter, the Hundred Years' War, the

Reformation, the Civil Wars and the Revolution, the Emancipation of the American Colonies from the Monarchy. If this course were framed and filled in with a true social intelligence, men would find that they had at the end of it a fair idea—an idea that might be of great value, and at any rate an idea much to be preferred to that blank ignorance which is in so many cases practically the only alternative—of the large issues of our past, of the antagonistic principles that strove with one another for mastery, of the chief material forces and moral currents of successive ages, and above all of those great men and our fathers that begat us—the Pyms, the Hampdens, the Cromwells, the Chathams—yes, and shall we not say the Washingtons—to whose sagacity, bravery, and unquenchable ardour for justice and order and equal laws all our English-speaking peoples owe a debt that can never be paid.

Another point is worth thinking of, besides the reduction of history for your purposes to a comprehensive body of rightly grouped generalities. Dr. Arnold says somewhere that he wishes the public might have a history of our present state of society *traced backwards*. It is the present that really interests us; it is the present that we seek to understand and to explain. I do not in the least want to know what happened in the past except as it enables me to see my way more clearly through what is happening to-day. I want to know what men thought and did in the thirteenth century, not out of any dilettante or idle antiquarian's curiosity, but because the thirteenth century is at the root of what men think and do in the nineteenth. Well then, it cannot be a bad educational rule to start from what is most interesting, and to work from that outwards and backwards. By beginning with the present we see more clearly what are the two things best worth attending to in history—not party intrigues nor battles nor dynastic affairs, nor even

many acts of parliament, but the great movements of the economic forces of a society on the one hand, and on the other the forms of religious opinion and ecclesiastical organization. All the rest are important, but their importance is subsidiary.

Allow me to make one more remark on this subject. If a dozen or a score of wise lectures would suffice for a general picture of the various phases through which our own society has passed, there ought to be added to the course of popular instruction as many lectures more, which should trace the history, not of England, but of the world. And the history of the world ought to go before the history of England. This is no paradox, but the deliberate opinion of many of those who have thought most deeply about the far-reaching chain of human progress. When I was on a visit to the United States some years ago—things may have improved since then—I could not help noticing that the history classes in their common schools all began their work with the year 1776, when the American colonies formed themselves into an independent confederacy. The teaching assumed that the creation of the universe occurred about that date. What could be more absurd, more narrow and narrowing, more mischievously misleading as to the whole purport and significance of history? As if the laws, the representative institutions, the religious uses, the scientific methods, the moral ideas, which give to an American citizen his character and mental habits and social surroundings, had not all their roots in the deeds and thoughts of wise and brave men, who lived in centuries which are of course just as much the inheritance of the vast continent of the West, as they are of the little island from whence its first colonisers sailed forth.

Well, there is something nearly as absurd, if not quite, in

our common plan of taking for granted that people should begin their reading of history, not in 1776, but in 1066. As if this could bring into our minds what is after all the greatest lesson of history, namely, the fact of its oneness; of the interdependence of all the elements that have in the course of long ages made the European of to-day what we see him to be. It is no doubt necessary for clear and definite comprehension to isolate your phenomenon, and to follow the stream of our own history separately. But that cannot be enough. We must also see that this stream is the effluent of a far broader and mightier flood—whose springs and sources and great tributaries lay higher up in the history of mankind.

'We are learning,' says Mr. Freeman, whose little book on the *Unity of History* I cannot be wrong in warmly recommending even to the busiest among you, 'that European history, from its first glimmerings to our own day, is one unbroken drama, no part of which can be rightly understoood without reference to the other parts which come before and after it. We are learning that of this great drama Rome is the centre, the point to which all roads lead and from which all roads lead no less. The world of independent Greece stands on one side of it; the world of modern Europe stands on another. But the history alike of the great centre itself, and of its satellites on either side, can never be fully grasped except from a point of view wide enough to take in the whole group, and to mark the relations of each of its members to the centre and to one another.'

Now the counsel which our learned historian thus urges upon the scholar and the leisured student, equally represents the point of view which is proper for the more numerous classes of whom we are thinking to-night. The scale will have to be reduced; all save the very broadest aspects of things will

have to be left out; none save the highest ranges and the streams of most copious volume will find a place in that map. Small as is the scale and many as are its omissions, yet if a man has intelligently followed the very shortest course of universal history, it will be the fault of his teacher if he has not acquired an impressive conception, which will never be effaced, of the destinies of man upon the earth; of the mighty confluence of forces working on from age to age, which have their meeting in every one of us here to-night; of the order in which each state of society has followed its foregoer, according to great and changeless laws 'embracing all things and all times;' of the thousand faithful hands that have one after another, each in their several degrees, orders, and capacities, trimmed the silver lamp of knowledge and kept its sacred flame bright from generation to generation and age to age, now in one land and now in another, from its early spark among far-off dim Chaldeans down to Goethe and Faraday and Darwin and all the other good workers of our own day.

The shortest course of universal history will let him see how he owes to the Greek civilisation, on the shores of the Mediterranean two thousand years back, a debt extending from the architectural forms of this very Town Hall to some of the most systematic operations of his own mind; will let him see the forum of Rome, its roads and its gates—

> 'What conflux issuing forth or entering in,
> Prætors, Proconsuls to their provinces
> Hasting or on return, in robes of state—'

all busily welding an empire together in a marvellous framework of citizenship, manners, and laws, that laid assured foundations for a still higher civilisation that was to come after. He will learn how when the Roman Empire declined, then at Damascus

and Bagdad and Seville the Mahometan conquerors took up the torch of science and learning, and handed it on to western Europe when the new generations were ready. He will learn how in the mean time, during ages which we both wrongly and ungratefully call dark, from Rome again, that other great organization, the mediæval Church, had arisen, which amid many imperfections and some crimes did a work that no glory of physical science can equal, and no instrument of physical science can compass, in purifying men's appetites, in setting discipline and direction on their lives, and in offering to humanity new types of moral obligation and fairer ideals of saintly perfection, whose light still shines like a star to guide our own poor voyages. It is only by this contemplation of the life of our race as a whole that men see the beginnings and the ends of things; learn not to be near-sighted in history, but to look before and after; see their own part and lot in the rising up and going down of empires and faiths since first recorded time began; and what I am contending for is that even if you can take your young men and women no further than the mere vestibule of this ancient and ever venerable Temple of many marvels, you will have opened to them the way to a kind of knowledge that not only enlightens the understanding, but enriches the character—which is a higher thing than mere intellect—and makes it constantly alive with the spirit of beneficence.

I know it is said that such a view of collective history is true, but that you will never get plain people to respond to it; it is a thing for intellectual dilettanti and moralising virtuosi. Well, we do not know, because we have never yet honestly tried, what the commonest people will or will not respond to. When Sir Richard Wallace's pictures were being exhibited at Bethnal Green, after people had said that the workers had no souls for

art and would not appreciate its treasures, a story is told of a female in very poor clothes gazing intently at a picture of the Infant Jesus in the arms of his Mother, and then exclaiming, '*Who would not try to be a good woman, who had such a child as that?*' We have never yet, I say, tried the height and pitch to which our people are capable of rising.

I have thought it well to take this opportunity of saying a word for history, because I cannot help thinking that one of the most narrow, and what will eventually be one of the most impoverishing, characteristics of our day is the excessive supremacy claimed for physical science. This is partly due, no doubt, to a most wholesome reaction against the excessive supremacy that has hitherto been claimed for literature, and held by literature, in our schools and universities. At the same time, it is well to remember that the historic sciences are making strides not unworthy of being compared with those of the physical sciences, and not only is there room for both, but any system is radically wrong which excludes or depresses either to the advantage of the other.[1]

And now there is another idea which I should like to throw out, if you will not think it too tedious and too special. It is an old saying that, after all, the great end and aim of the British Constitution is to get twelve honest men into a box. That is really a very sensible way of putting the theory, that the first end of government is to give security to life and

[1] A very eminent physicist writes to me on this passage: 'I cannot help smiling when I think of the place of physical science in the endowed schools,' etc. My reference was to the great prevalence of such assertions as that human progress depends upon increase of our knowledge of the conditions of material phenomena (Dr. Draper, for instance, lays this down as a fundamental axiom of history): as if moral advance, the progressive elevation of types of character and ethical ideals, were not at least an equally important cause of improvement in civilisation. The type of Saint Vincent de Paul is plainly as indispensable to progress as the type of Newton.

property, and to make people keep their contracts. But with this view it is not only important that you should get twelve honest men into a box: the twelve honest men must have in their heads some notions as to what constitutes Evidence. Now it is surely a striking thing that while we are so careful to teach physical science and literature; while men want to be endowed in order to have leisure to explore our spinal cords, and to observe the locomotor system of Medusæ—and I have no objection against those who urge on all these studies—yet there is no systematic teaching, very often no teaching at all, in the principles of Evidence and Reasoning, even for the bulk of those who would be very much offended if we were to say that they are not educated. Of course I use the term evidence in a wider sense than the testimony in crimes and contracts, and the other business of courts of law. Questions of evidence are rising at every hour of the day. As Bentham says, it is a question of evidence with the cook whether the joint of meat is roasted enough. It has been excellently said that the principal and most characteristic difference between one human intellect and another consists in their ability to judge correctly of evidence. Most of us, Mr. Mill says, are very unsafe hands at estimating evidence, if appeal cannot be made to actual eyesight. Indeed, if we think of some of the tales that have been lately diverting the British Association, we might perhaps go further, and describe many of us as very bad hands at estimating evidence, even where appeal can be made to actual eyesight. Eyesight, in fact, is the least part of the matter. The senses are as often the tools as the guides of reason. One of the longest chapters in the history of vulgar error would contain the cases in which the eyes have only seen what old prepossessions inspired them to see, and were blind to all that would have been fatal to the prepossessions. 'It is beyond all

question or dispute,' says Voltaire, 'that magic words and ceremonies are quite capable of most effectually destroying a whole flock of sheep, if the words be accompanied by a sufficient quantity of arsenic.' Sorcery has no doubt been exploded—at least we assume that it has—but the temper that made men attribute all the efficacy to the magic words, and entirely overlook the arsenic, still prevails in a great host of moral and political affairs, into which it is not convenient to enter here. The stability of a government for instance is constantly set down to some ornamental part of it, when in fact the ornamental part has no more to do with stability than the incantations of the soothsayer.

You have heard, again, that for many generations the people of the Isle of St. Kilda believed that the arrival of a ship in the harbour inflicted on the islanders epidemic colds in the head, and many ingenious reasons were from time to time devised by clever men why the ship should cause colds among the population. At last it occurred to somebody that the ship might not be the cause of the colds, but that both might be the common effects of some other cause, and it was then remembered that a ship could only enter the harbour when there was a strong north-east wind blowing.

However faithful the observation, as soon as ever a man uses words he may begin at that moment to go wrong. 'A village apothecary,' it has been said, 'and if possible in a still greater degree, an experienced nurse, is seldom able to describe the plainest case without employing a phraseology of which every word is a theory; the simplest narrative of the most illiterate observer involves more or less of hypothesis;' —yet both by the observer himself and by most of those who listen to him, each of these conjectural assumptions is treated as respectfully as if it were an established axiom. We are

supposed to deny the possibility of a circumstance, when in truth we only deny the evidence alleged for it. We allow the excellence of reasoning from certain data to captivate our belief in the truth of the data themselves, even when they are unproved and unprovable. There is no end, in short, of the ways in which men habitually go wrong in their reasoning, tacit or expressed. The greatest boon that any benefactor could confer on the human race would be to teach men—and especially women—to quantify their propositions. It sometimes seems as if Swift were right when he said that Mankind were just as fit for flying as for thinking.

Now it is quite true that mother-wit and the common experiences of life do often furnish people with a sort of shrewd and sound judgment that carries them very creditably through the world. They come to good conclusions, though perhaps they would give bad reasons for them, if they were forced to find their reasons. But you cannot count upon mother-wit in everybody; perhaps not even in a majority. And then as for the experience of life,—there are a great many questions, and those of the deepest ultimate importance to mankind, in which the ordinary experience of life sheds no light, until it has been interrogated and interpreted by men with trained minds. 'It is far easier,' as has been said, 'to acquire facts than to judge what they prove.' What is done in our systems of training to teach people how to judge what facts prove? There is Mathematics, no doubt; anybody who has done even no more than the first book of Euclid's geometry, ought to have got into his head the notion of a demonstration, of the rigorously close connection between a conclusion and its premisses, of the necessity of being able to show how each link in the chain comes to be where it is, and that it has a right to be there. This, however, is a long way from the facts of real life, and a

man might well be a great geometer, and still be a thoroughly bad reasoner in practical questions.

Again, in other of your classes, in Chemistry, in Astronomy, in Natural History, besides acquiring groups of facts, the student has a glimpse of the method by which they were discovered, of the type of inference to which the discovery conforms, so that the discovery of a new comet, the detection of a new species, the invention of a new chemical compound, each becomes a lesson of the most beautiful and impressive kind in the art of reasoning. And it would be superfluous and impertinent for me here to point out how valuable such lessons are in the way of mental discipline, apart from the fruit they bear in other ways. But here again the relation to the judgments we have to form in the moral, political, practical sphere, is too remote and too indirect. The judgments, in this region, of the most brilliant and successful explorers in physical science, seem to be exactly as liable to every kind of fallacy as those of other people. The application of scientific method and conception to society is yet in its infancy, and the *Novum Organum* or the *Principia* of moral and social phenomena will perhaps not be wholly disclosed to any of us now alive. In any case it is clear that for the purposes of such an institution as this, if the rules of evidence and proof and all the other safeguards for making your propositions true and relevant, are to be taught at all, they must be taught not only in an elementary form, but with illustrations that shall convey their own direct reference and application to practical life. If everybody could find time to master Mill's *Logic* or so instructive and interesting a book as Professor Jevons's *Principles of Science*, a certain number at any rate of the bad mental habits of people would be cured; and for those of you here who have leisure enough, and want to find a worthy keystone of

your culture, it would be hard to find a better thing to do for the next six months than to work through one or both of the books I have just named—pen in hand. The ordinary text-books of formal logic do not seem to meet the special aim which I am now trying to impress as desirable—namely the habit of valuing, not merely speculative nor scientific truth, but the truth of practical life; a practising of the intellect in forming and expressing the opinions and judgments that form the staple of our daily discourse.

It is now accepted that the most effective way of learning a foreign language is to begin by reading books written in it, or by conversing in it—and then after a certain empirical familiarity with vocabulary and construction has been acquired, one may proceed to master the grammar. Just in the same way it would seem to be the best plan to approach the art of practical reasoning in concrete examples, in cases of actual occurrence and living interest; and then after the processes of disentangling a complex group of propositions, of dividing and sifting, of scenting a fallacy, have all become familiar, it may be worth while to find names for them all, and to set out rules for reasoning rightly, just as in the former illustration the rules of writing correctly follow a certain practice, rather than precede it.

Now it has long seemed to me that the best way of teaching carefulness and precision in dealing with propositions might be found through the medium of the argumentation in the courts of justice. This is reasoning in real matter. There is a famous book well known to legal students—*Smith's Leading Cases*—which contains a selection of important decisions, and sets forth the grounds on which the courts arrived at them. I have often thought that a dozen or a score of cases might be collected from this book into a small volume, that would make

such a manual as no other matter could, for opening plain men's eyes to the logical pitfalls among which they go stumbling and crashing, when they think they are disputing like Socrates or reasoning like Newton. They would see how a proposition or an expression that looks straightforward and unmistakable, is yet on examination found to be capable of bearing several distinct interpretations and meaning several distinct things; how the same evidence may warrant different conclusions, and what kinds of evidence carry with them what degrees of validity: how certain sorts of facts can only be proved in one way, and certain other sorts of facts in some other way: how necessary it is, before you set out, to know exactly what it is you intend to show, or what it is you intend to dispute; how there may be many argumentative objections to a proposition, yet the balance be in favour of its adoption. It is from the generality of people having neglected to practise the attention on these and the like matters, that interest and prejudice find so ready an instrument of sophistry in that very art of speech which ought to be the organ of reason and truth. To bring the matter to a point, then, I submit that it might be worth while in this and all such institutions to have a class for the study of Logic, Reasoning, Evidence, and that such a class might well find its best material in selections from Leading Cases, and from Bentham's *Rationale of Judicial Evidence*, elucidated by those special sections in Mill's *Logic*, or smaller manuals such as those of Mr. Fowler, the Oxford Professor of Logic, which treat of the department of Fallacies. Perhaps Bentham's *Book of Fallacies* is too political for me to commend it to you here. But if there happens to be any one in Birmingham who is fond of meeting proposed changes by saying that they are Utopian; that they are good in theory, but bad in practice; that they are too good to be realised, and so forth,

then I can promise him that he will in that book hear of something very much to his advantage.[1]

An incidental advantage—which is worth mentioning—of making legal instances the medium of instruction in practical logic, would be that people would—not learn law, of course, in the present state of our system, but they would have their attention called in a direct and business-like way to the lawyer's point of view, and those features of procedure in which every man and woman in the land has so immediate an interest. Perhaps if people interested themselves more seriously than is implied by reading famous cases in the newspapers, we should get rid, for one thing, of the rule which makes the accused person in a criminal case incompetent to testify; and, for another, of that infamous license of cross-examination to credit, which is not only barbarous to those who have to submit to it, but leads to constant miscarriage of justice in the case of those who, rather than submit to it, will suffer wrong.

It will be said, I dare say, that overmuch scruple about our propositions and the evidence for them will reduce men, especially the young, to the intellectual condition of the great philosopher, Marphurius, in Molière's comedy. Marphurius rebukes Sganarelle for saying he had come into the room;—'What you should say is, that it *seems* I am come into the room.' Instead of the downright affirmations and burly nega-

[1] This suggestion has fortunately found favour in a quarter where shrewd and critical common-sense is never wanting. The *Economist* (Oct. 14) writes:—'Such a text-book commented on to a class by a man trained to estimate the value of evidence, would form a most valuable study, and not, we should imagine, at all less fascinating than valuable. Of course the class suggested would not be a class in English law, but in the principles on which evidence should be estimated, and the special errors to which, in common life, average minds are most liable. We regard this suggestion as a most useful one, and as one which would not only greatly contribute to the educational worth of an institute for adults, but also to its popularity.'

tions so becoming to Britons, he would bring down all our propositions to the attenuation of a possibility or a perhaps. We need not fear such an end. The exigencies of practical affairs will not allow this endless balancing. They are always driving men to the other extreme, making us like the new judge, who first heard the counsel on one side and made up his mind on the merits of the case, until the turn of the opposing counsel came, and then the new counsel filled the judge with so many doubts and perplexities, that he suddenly vowed that nothing would induce him to pay any heed to evidence again as long as he lived.

I do not doubt that I shall be blamed in what I have said about French, and about history, for encouraging a spirit of superficiality, and of contentment with worthless smatterings of things. To this I should answer that, as Archbishop Whately pointed out long ago, it is a fallacy to mistake general truths for superficial truths, or a knowledge of the leading propositions of a subject for a superficial knowledge. 'To have a general knowledge of a subject is to know only its leading truths, but to know these thoroughly, so as to have a true conception of the subject in its great features.' (*Mill.*) And I need not point out that instruction may be of the most general kind, and still possess that most important quality of all instruction—namely, being *methodical.*

I think popular instruction has been made much more repulsive than it need have been, and more repulsive than it ought to have been, because those who have had the control of the movement for the last fifty years, have been too anxious to make the type of popular instruction conform to the type of academic instruction proper to learned men. The principles of instruction have been too rigorously ascetic and puritanical,

and instead of making the access to knowledge as easy as possible, we have delighted in forcing every pilgrim to make his journey to the shrine of the Muses with a hair-shirt on his back and peas in his shoes. Nobody would say that Macaulay had a superficial knowledge of the things best worth knowing in ancient literature, yet we have his own confession that when he became a busy man—as you are all busy—then he read his classics, not like a collegian, but like a man of the world; if he did not know a word, he passed it over, and if a passage refused to give up its meaning at the second reading, then he let it alone. Now the aims of academic education and those of popular education are—it is obvious if you come to think of it—quite different. The end of the one is rather to increase knowledge: of the other to diffuse it, and to increase men's interest in what is already known. If, therefore, I am for making certain kinds of instruction as general as they can possibly be made in these local centres, I should give to the old seats of learning a very special function indeed.

It would be absurd to attempt to discuss academic organization here, at this hour. I only want to ask you as politicians whose representatives in parliament will ultimately settle the matter—to reflect whether the money now consumed in idle fellowships might not be more profitably employed in endowing inquirers. The favourite argument of those who support prize fellowships is that they are the only means by which a child of the working-class can raise himself to the highest positions in the land. My answer to this would be that, in the first place, it is of questionable expediency to invite the cleverest members of any class to leave it—instead of making their abilities available in it, and so raising the whole class along with, and by means of, their own rise. Second, these prize fellowships will continue, and must continue, to be carried off by those who

can afford time and money to educate their sons for the competition. Third, I doubt the expediency—and the history of Oxford within the last twenty-five years strikingly confirms this doubt—of giving to a young man of any class what is practically a premium on indolence, and the removal of a motive to self-reliant and energetic spirit of enterprise. The best thing that I can think of as happening to a young man is this: that he should have been educated at a day-school in his own town; that he should have opportunities of following also the higher education in his own town; and that at the earliest convenient time he should be taught to earn his own living.

The Universities might then be left to their proper business of study. Knowledge for its own sake is clearly an object which only a very small portion of society can be spared to pursue; only a very few men in a generation have that devouring passion for knowing, which is the true inspirer of fruitful study and exploration. Even if the passion were more common than it is, the world could not afford on any very large scale that men should indulge in it: the great business of the world has to be carried on. One of the greatest of all hindrances to making things better, is the habit of taking for granted that plans or ideas, simply because they are different and approach the matter from different sides, are therefore the rivals and enemies, instead of being the friends and complements of one another. But a great and wealthy society like ours ought very well to be able to nourish one or two great seats for the augmentation of true learning, and at the same time make sure that young men—and again I say, especially young women—should have good education of the higher kind within reach of their own hearths.

It is not necessary for me here, I believe, to dwell upon any

of the great commonplaces which the follower of knowledge does well to keep always before his eyes, and which represent the wisdom of many generations of studious experience. You may have often heard from others, or may have found out, how good it is to have on your shelves, however scantily furnished they may be, three or four of those books, to which it is well to give ten minutes every morning, before going down into the battle and choking dust of the day. Men will name these books for themselves. One will choose the Bible, another Goethe, one the *Imitation of Christ*, another Wordsworth. Perhaps it matters little what it be, so long as your writer has cheerful seriousness, elevation, calm, and, above all, a sense of size and strength, which shall open out the day before you and bestow gifts of fortitude and mastery.

Then, to turn to the intellectual side. You know as well as I or any one can tell you, that knowledge is worth little until you have made it so perfectly your own, as to be capable of reproducing it in precise and definite form. Goethe said that in the end we only retain of our studies, after all, what we practically employ of them. And it is at least well that in our serious studies we should have the possibility of practically turning them to a definite destination, clearly before our eyes. Nobody can be sure that he has got clear ideas on a subject, unless he has tried to put them down on a piece of paper in independent words of his own. It is an excellent plan, too, when you have read a good book, to sit down and write a short abstract of what you can remember of it. It is a still better plan, if you can make up your minds to a slight extra labour, to do what Lord Strafford, and Gibbon, and Daniel Webster did. After glancing over the title, subject, or design of a book, these eminent men would take a pen and write roughly what questions they expected to find answered in it, what difficulties

solved, what kind of information imparted. Such practices keep us from reading with the eye only, gliding vaguely over the page; and they help us to *place* our new acquisitions in relation with what we knew before. It is almost always worth while to read a thing twice over, to make sure that nothing has been missed or dropped on the way, or wrongly conceived or interpreted. And if the subject be serious, it is often well to let an interval elapse. Ideas, relations, statements of fact, are not to be taken by storm. We have to steep them in the mind, in the hope of thus extracting their inmost essence and significance. If one lets an interval pass, and then returns, it is surprising how clear and ripe that has become, which, when we left it, seemed crude, obscure, full of perplexity.

All this takes trouble, no doubt, but then it will not do to deal with ideas that we find in books or elsewhere as a certain bird does with its eggs—leave them in the sand for the sun to hatch and chance to rear. People who follow this plan possess nothing better than ideas half-hatched, and convictions reared by accident. They are like a man who should pace up and down the world in the delusion that he is clad in sumptuous robes of purple and velvet, when in truth he is only half-covered by the rags and tatters of other people's cast-off clothes.

Apart from such mechanical devices as these I have mentioned, there are habits and customary attitudes of mind which a conscientious reader will practise, if he desires to get out of a book still greater benefits than the writer of it may have designed or thought of. For example, he should never be content with mere aggressive and negatory criticism of the page before him. The page may be open to such criticism, and in that case it is natural to indulge in it; but the reader will often find an unexpected profit by asking himself—What does

this error teach me? How comes that fallacy to be here? How came the writer to fall into this defect of taste? To ask such questions gives a reader a far healthier tone of mind in the long run, more seriousness, more depth, more moderation of judgment, more insight into other men's ways of thinking as well as into his own, than any amount of impatient condemnation and hasty denial, even when both condemnation and denial may be in their place.

Again, let us not be too ready to detect an inconsistency in our author, but rather let us teach ourselves to distinguish between inconsistency and having two sides to an opinion. 'Before I admit that two and two are four,' some one said, 'I must first know to what use you are going to put the proposition.' That is to say, even the plainest proposition needs to be stated with a view to the drift of the discussion in hand, or with a view to some special part of the discussion. When the turn of some other part of the matter comes, it will be convenient and often necessary to bring out into full light another side of your opinion, not contradictory, but complementary, and the great distinction of a candid disputant or of a reader of good faith, is his willingness to take pains to see the points of reconciliation among different aspects and different expressions of what is substantially the same judgment.

Then, again, nobody here needs to be reminded that the great successes of the world have been affairs of a second, a third, nay a fiftieth trial. The history of literature, of science, of art, of industrial achievements, all testify to the truth that success is only the last term of what looked like a series of failures. What is true of the great achievements of history, is true also of the little achievements of the observant cultivator of his own understanding. If a man is despondent about his work, the best remedy that I can prescribe to him is to turn to a

good biography; there he will find that other men before him have known the dreary reaction that follows long-sustained effort, and he will find that one of the differences between the first-rate man and the fifth-rate lies in the vigour with which the first-rate man recovers from this reaction, and crushes it down, and again flings himself once more upon the breach. I remember the wisest and most virtuous man I have ever known, or am ever likely to know—Mr. Mill—once saying to me that whenever he had written anything, he always felt profoundly dissatisfied with it, and it was only by reflecting that he had felt the same about other pieces of which the world had thought well, that he could bring himself to send the new production to the printer. The heroism of the scholar and the truth-seeker is not less admirable than the heroism of the man-at-arms.

Finally, you none of you need to be reminded of the most central and important of all the commonplaces of the student—that the stuff of which life is made is Time; that it is better, as Goethe said, to do the most trifling thing in the world, than to think half an hour a trifling thing. Nobody means by this that we are to have no pleasures. Where time is lost and wasted is where many people lose and waste their money—in things that are neither pleasure nor business—in those random and officious sociabilities, which neither refresh nor instruct nor invigorate, but only fret and benumb and wear all edge off the mind. All these things, however, you have all of you often thought about; yet, alas, we are so ready to forget, both in these matters and in other and weightier, how irrevocable are our mistakes.

> 'The moving Finger writes, and having writ,
> Moves on; nor all your piety nor wit
> Can lure it back to cancel half a line,
> Nor all your tears wipe out a word of it.'

And now I think I cannot ask you to listen any longer. I will only add that these ceremonial anniversaries when they are over, sometimes slightly tend to depress us, unless we are on our guard. When the prizes of the year are all distributed, and the address is at an end, we perhaps ask ourselves, Well, and what then? It is not to be denied that the expectations of the first fervent promoters of popular instruction by such Institutes as this—of men like Lord Brougham and others, a generation ago—were not fulfilled. The principal reason was that the elementary instruction of the country was not then sufficiently advanced to supply a population ready to take advantage of education in the higher subjects. Well, we are in a fair way for removing that obstacle. It is true that the old world moves tardily on its arduous way, but even if the results of all our efforts in the cause of education were smaller than they are, there are still two considerations that ought to weigh with us and encourage us.

For one thing, you never know what child in rags and pitiful squalor that meets you in the street, may have in him the germ of gifts that might add new treasures to the store-house of beautiful things or noble acts. In that great storm of terror which swept over France in 1793, a certain man who was every hour expecting to be led off to the guillotine, uttered this memorable sentiment. 'Even at this incomprehensible moment'—he said—'when mortality, enlightenment, love of country, all of them only make death at the prison-door or on the scaffold more certain—yes, on the fatal tumbril itself, with nothing free but my voice, I could still cry *Take care*, to a child that should come too near the wheel; perhaps I may save his life, perhaps he may one day save his country.' This is a generous and inspiring thought—one to which the roughest-handed man or woman in Birmingham may respond

as honestly and heartily as the philosopher who wrote it. It ought to shame the listlessness with which so many of us see the great phantasmagoria of life pass before us.

There is another thought to encourage us, still more direct, and still more positive. The boisterous old notion of hero-worship, which has been preached by so eloquent a voice in our age, is after all now seen to be a half-truth, and to contain the less edifying and the less profitable half of the truth. The world will never be able to spare its hero, and the man with the rare and inexplicable gift of genius will always be as commanding a figure as he has ever been. What we see every day with increasing clearness is that not only the well-being of the many, but the chances of exceptional genius, moral or intellectual, in the gifted few, are highest in a society where the *average* interest, curiosity, capacity, are all highest. The moral of this for you and for me is plain. We cannot, like Beethoven or Handel, lift the soul by the magic of divine melody into the seventh heaven of ineffable vision and hope incommensurable; we cannot, like Newton, weigh the far-off stars in a balance, and measure the heavings of the eternal flood; we cannot, like Voltaire, scorch up what is cruel and false by a word as a flame, nor, like Milton or Burke, awaken men's hearts with the note of an organ-trumpet; we cannot, like the great saints of the churches and the great sages of the schools, add to those acquisitions of spiritual beauty and intellectual mastery which have, one by one, and little by little, raised man from being no higher than the brute to be only a little lower than the angels. But what we can do—the humblest of us in this great hall—is by diligently using our own minds and diligently seeking to extend our own opportunities to others, to help to swell that common tide, on the force and the set of whose currents depends the prosperous

voyaging of humanity. When our names are blotted out, and our place knows us no more, the energy of each social service will remain, and so too, let us not forget, will each social disservice remain, like the unending stream of one of nature's forces. The thought that this is so, may well lighten the poor perplexities of our daily life, and even soothe the pang of its calamities; it lifts us from our feet as on wings, opening a larger meaning to our private toil and a higher purpose to our public endeavour; it makes the morning as we awake to its welcome, and the evening like a soft garment as it wraps us about; it nerves our arm with boldness against oppression and injustice, and strengthens our voice with deeper accents against falsehood, while we are yet in the full noon of our days—yes, and perhaps it will shed some ray of consolation, when our eyes are growing dim to it all, and we go down into the Valley of Darkness.

MACAULAY

MACAULAY.

'AFTER glancing my eye over the design and order of a new book,' says Gibbon, 'I suspended the perusal till I had finished the task of self-examination, till I had revolved in a solitary walk all that I knew or believed or had thought, on the subject of the whole work, or of some particular chapter: I was then qualified to discern how much the author added to my original stock; and if I was sometimes satisfied by the agreement, I was sometimes warned by the opposition, of our ideas.' It is also told of Strafford that before reading any book for the first time, he would call for a sheet of paper, and then proceed to write down upon it some sketch of the ideas that he already had upon the subject of the book, and of the questions that he expected to find answered. No one who has been at the pains to try the experiment, will doubt the usefulness of this practice: it gives to our acquisitions from books clearness and reality, a right place and an independent shape. At this moment we are all looking for the biography of an illustrious man of letters, written by a near kinsman, who is himself naturally endowed with keen literary interests, and who has invigorated his academic cultivation by practical engagement in considerable affairs of public business. Before taking up Mr. Trevelyan's two volumes, it is perhaps worth while, on Strafford's plan, to ask ourselves shortly what kind of significance or value belongs to Lord Macaulay's achievements, and to what place he has a claim among the forces of English literature. It is seventeen years since he died, and those of us

who never knew him nor ever saw him, may now think about his work with that perfect detachment which is impossible in the case of actual contemporaries.[1]

That Macaulay comes in the very front rank in the mind of the ordinary bookbuyer of our day is quite certain. It is an amusement with some people to put an imaginary case of banishment to a desert island, with the privilege of choosing the works of one author, and no more than one, to furnish literary companionship and refreshment for the rest of a lifetime. Whom would one select for this momentous post? Clearly the author must be voluminous, for days on desert islands are many and long; he must be varied in his moods, his topics, and his interests; he must have a great deal to say, and must have a power of saying it that shall arrest a depressed and dolorous spirit. Englishmen, of course, would with mechanical unanimity call for Shakespeare; Germans could hardly hesitate about Goethe; and a sensible Frenchman would pack up the ninety volumes of Voltaire. It would be at least as interesting to know the object of a second choice, supposing the tyrant in his clemency to give us two authors. In the case of Englishmen there is some evidence as to a popular preference.

[1] Since the following piece was written, Mr. Trevelyan's biography of Lord Macaulay has appeared, and has enjoyed the great popularity to which its careful execution, its brightness of style, its good taste, its sound judgment, so richly entitle it. If Mr. Trevelyan's course in politics were not so useful as it is, one might be tempted to regret that he had not chosen literature for the main field of his career. The portrait which he draws of Lord Macaulay is so irresistibly attractive in many ways, that a critic may be glad to have delivered his soul before his judgment was subject to a dangerous bias, by the picture of Macaulay's personal character—its domestic amiability, its benevolence to unlucky followers of letters, its manliness, its high public spirit and generous patriotism. On reading my criticism over again, I am well pleased to find that not an epithet needs to be altered,—so independent is opinion as to this strong man's work, of our esteem for his loyal and upright character.

A recent traveller in Australia informs us that the three books which he found on every squatter's shelf, and which at last he knew before he crossed the threshold that he should be sure to find, were Shakespeare, the Bible, and Macaulay's Essays. This is only an illustration of a feeling about Macaulay that has been almost universal among the English-speaking peoples.

We may safely say that no man obtains and keeps for a great many years such a position as this, unless he is possessed of some very extraordinary qualities, or else of common qualities in a very uncommon and extraordinary degree. The world, says Goethe, is more willing to endure the Incongruous than to be patient under the Insignificant. Even those who set least value on what Macaulay does for his readers, may still feel bound to distinguish the elements that have given him his vast popularity. The inquiry is not a piece of merely literary criticism, for it is impossible that the work of so imposing a writer should have passed through the hands of every man and woman of his time who has even the humblest pretensions to cultivation, without leaving a very decided mark on their habits both of thought and expression. As a plain matter of observation, it is impossible to take up a newspaper or a review, for instance, without perceiving Macaulay's influence both in the style and the temper of modern journalism, and journalism in its turn acts upon the style and temper of its enormous uncounted public. The man who now succeeds in catching the ear of the writers of leading articles, is in the position that used to be held by the head of some great theological school, whence disciples swarmed forth to reproduce in ten thousand pulpits the arguments, the opinions, the images, the tricks, the postures, and the mannerisms of a single master.

Two men of very different kinds have thoroughly impressed the journalists of our time, Macaulay and Mr. Mill. Mr.

Carlyle we do not add to them; he is, as the Germans call Jean Paul, *der Einzige*. And he is a poet, while the other are in their degrees serious and argumentative writers, dealing in different ways with the great topics that constitute the matter and business of daily discussion. They are both of them practical enough to interest men handling real affairs, and yet they are general or theoretical enough to supply such men with the large and ready commonplaces which are useful to a profession that has to produce literary graces and philosophical decorations at an hour's notice. It might perhaps be said of these two distinguished men that our public writers owe most of their virtues to the one, and most of their vices to the other. If Mill taught some of them to reason, Macaulay tempted more of them to declaim: if Mill set an example of patience, tolerance, and fair examination of hostile opinions Macaulay did much to encourage oracular arrogance, and a rather too thrasonical complacency; if Mill sowed ideas of the great economic, political, and moral bearings of the forces of society, Macaulay trained a taste for superficial particularities, trivial circumstantialities of local colour, and all the paraphernalia of the pseudo-picturesque.

Of course nothing so obviously untrue is meant as that this is an account of Macaulay's own quality. What is empty pretension in the leading article, was often a warranted self-assertion in Macaulay; what in it is little more than testiness, is in him often a generous indignation. What became and still remain in those who have made him their model, substantive and organic vices, the foundation of literary character and intellectual temper, were in him the incidental defects of a vigorous genius. And we have to take a man of his power and vigour with all his drawbacks, for the one are wrapped up in the other. Charles Fox used to apply to Burke a passage that

Quintilian wrote about Ovid. 'Si animi sui affectibus temperare quam indulgere maluisset,' quoted Fox, 'quid vir iste præstare non potuerit!' But this is really not at all certain either of Ovid, or Burke, or any one else. It suits moralists to tell us that excellence lies in the happy mean and nice balance of our faculties and impulses, and perhaps in so far as our own contentment and an easy passage through life are involved, what they tell us is true. But for making a mark in the world, for rising to supremacy in art or thought or affairs—whatever those aims may be worth—a man possibly does better to indulge, rather than to chide or grudge, his genius, and to pay the penalties for his weakness, rather than run any risk of mutilating those strong faculties of which they happen to be an inseparable accident. Versatility is not a universal gift among the able men of the world; not many of them have so many gifts of the spirit, as to be free to choose by what pass they will climb 'the steep where Fame's proud temple shines afar.' If Macaulay had applied himself to the cultivation of a balanced judgment, of tempered phrases, and of relative propositions, he would probably have sunk into an impotent tameness. A great pugilist has sometimes been converted from the error of his ways, and been led zealously to cherish gospel graces, but the hero's discourses have seldom had the notes of unction and edification. Macaulay, divested of all the exorbitancies of his spirit and his style, would have been a Samson shorn of the locks of his strength.

Although, however, a writer of marked quality may do well to let his genius develop its spontaneous forces without too assiduous or vigilant repression, trusting to other writers of equal strength in other directions, and to the general fitness of things and operation of time, to redress the balance, still it is the task of criticism in counting up the contributions of one

of these strong men to examine the mischiefs no less than the benefits incident to their work. There is no puny carping nor cavilling in the process. It is because such men are strong that they are able to do harm; they may injure the taste and judgment of a whole generation, just because they are never mediocre. That is implied in strength. Macaulay is not to be measured now merely as if he were the author of a new book. His influence has been a distinct literary force, and in an age of reading, this is to be a distinct force in deciding the temper, the process, the breadth, of men's opinions, no less than the manner of expressing them. It is no new observation that the influence of an author becomes in time something apart from his books: a certain generalized or abstract personality impresses itself on our minds, long after we have forgotten the details of his opinions, the arguments by which he enforced them, and even, what are usually the last to escape us, the images by which he illustrated them. Phrases and sentences are a mask: but we detect the features of the man behind the mask. This personality of a favourite author is a real and powerful agency. Unconsciously we are infected with his humours; we apply his methods; we find ourselves copying the rhythm and measure of his periods; we wonder how he would have acted, or thought, or spoken in our circumstances. Usually a strong writer leaves a special mark in some particular region of mental activity: the final product of him is to fix some persistent religious mood, or some decisive intellectual bias, or else some trick of the tongue. Now Macaulay has contributed no philosophic ideas to the speculative stock, nor has he developed any one great historic or social truth. His work is always full of a high spirit of manliness, probity, and honour; but he is not of that small band to whom we may apply Mackintosh's thrice and four times enviable panegyric

on the eloquence of Dugald Stewart, that its peculiar glory consisted in having 'breathed the love of virtue into whole generations of pupils.' He has painted many striking pictures, and imparted a certain reality to our conception of many great scenes of the past. He did good service in banishing once for all those sentimental Jacobite leanings and prejudices which had been kept alive by the sophistry of the most popular of historians, and the imagination of the most popular of romance writers. But where he set his stamp has been upon style; style in its widest sense, not merely on the grammar and mechanism of writing, but on what De Quincey described as its *organology;* style, that is to say, in its relation to ideas and feelings, its commerce with thought, and its reaction on what one may call the temper or conscience of the intellect.

Let no man suppose that it matters little whether the most universally popular of the serious authors of a generation—and Macaulay was nothing less than this—affects *style coupé* or *style soutenu.* The critic of style is not the dancing-master, declaiming on the deep ineffable things that lie in a minuet. He is not the virtuoso of supines and gerundives. The morality of style goes deeper 'than dull fools suppose.' When Comte took pains to prevent any sentence from exceeding two lines of his manuscript or five of print; to restrict every paragraph to seven sentences; to exclude every hiatus between two sentences, or even between two paragraphs; and never to reproduce any word, except the auxiliary monosyllables, in two consecutive sentences; he justified his literary solicitude by insisting on the wholesomeness alike to heart and intelligence of submission to artificial institutions. He felt, after he had once mastered the habit of the new yoke, that it became the source of continual and unforeseeable improvements even in thought, and he perceived that the reason why verse is a

higher kind of literary perfection than prose, is that verse imposes a greater number of rigorous forms. We may add that verse itself is perfected, in the hands of men of poetic genius, in proportion to the severity of this mechanical regulation. Where Pope or Racine had one rule of metre, Victor Hugo has twenty, and he observes them as rigorously as an algebraist or an astronomer observes the rules of calculation or demonstration. One, then, who touches the style of a generation acquires no trifling authority over its thought and temper, as well as over the length of its sentences.

The first and most obvious secret of Macaulay's place on popular bookshelves is that he has a true genius for narration, and narration will always in the eyes, not only of our squatters in the Australian bush, but of the many all over the world, stand first among literary gifts. The common run of plain men, as has been noticed since the beginning of the world, are as eager as children for a story, and like children they will embrace the man who will tell them a story, with abundance of details and plenty of colour, and a realistic assurance that it is no mere make-believe. Macaulay never stops to brood over an incident or a character, with an inner eye intent on penetrating to the lowest depth of motive and cause, to the furthest complexity of impulse, calculation, and subtle incentive. The spirit of analysis is not in him, and the divine spirit of meditation is not in him. His whole mind runs in action and movement; it busies itself with eager interest in all objective particulars. He is seized by the external and the superficial, and revels in every detail that appeals to the five senses. 'The brilliant Macaulay,' said Emerson, with slight exaggeration, 'who expresses the tone of the English governing classes of the day, explicitly teaches that *good* means good to eat, good to

wear, material commodity.' So ready a faculty of exultation in the exceeding great glories of taste and touch, of loud sound and glittering spectacle, is a gift of the utmost service to the narrator who craves immense audiences. Let it be said that if Macaulay exults in the details that go to our five senses, his sensuousness is always clean, manly, and fit for honest daylight and the summer sun. There is none of that curious odour of autumnal decay that clings to the passion of a more modern school for colour and flavour and the enumerated treasures of subtle indulgence.

Mere picturesqueness, however, is a minor qualification compared with another quality which everybody assumes himself to have, but which is in reality extremely uncommon; the quality, I mean, of telling a tale directly and in straightforward order. In speaking of Hallam, Macaulay complained that Gibbon had brought into fashion an unpleasant trick of telling a story by implication and allusion. This provoking obliquity has certainly increased rather than declined since Hallam's day. Mr. Froude, it is true, whatever may be his shortcomings on the side of sound moral and political judgment, has admirable gifts in the way of straightforward narration, and Mr. Freeman, when he does not press too hotly after emphasis, and abstains from overloading his account with superabundance of detail, is usually excellent in the way of direct description. Still, it is not merely because these two writers are alive and Macaulay is not, that most people would say of him that he is unequalled in our time in his mastery of the art of letting us know in an express and unmistakable way exactly what it was that happened; though it is quite true that in many portions of his too elaborated History of William the Third he describes a large number of events about which, I think, no sensible man can in the least care either

how they happened, or whether indeed they happened at all or not.

Another reason why people have sought Macaulay is, that he has in one way or another something to tell them about many of the most striking personages and interesting events in the history of mankind. And he does really tell them something. If any one will be at the trouble to count up the number of those names that belong to the world and time, about which Macaulay has found not merely something, but something definite and pointed to say, he will be astonished to see how large a portion of the wide historic realm is traversed in that ample flight of reference, allusion, and illustration, and what unsparing copiousness of knowledge gives substance, meaning, and attraction to that resplendent blaze of rhetoric.

Macaulay came upon the world of letters just as the middle classes were expanding into enormous prosperity, were vastly increasing in numbers, and were becoming more alive than they had ever been before to literary interests. His Essays are as good as a library: they make an incomparable manual and vade-mecum for a busy uneducated man, who has curiosity and enlightenment enough to wish to know a little about the great lives and great thoughts, the shining words and many-coloured complexities of action, that have marked the journey of man through the ages. Macaulay had an intimate acquaintance both with the imaginative literature and the history of Greece and Rome, with the literature and the history of modern Italy, of France, and of England. Whatever his special subject, he contrives to pour into it with singular dexterity a stream of rich, graphic, and telling illustrations from all these widely diversified sources. Figures from history, ancient and modern, sacred and secular; characters from plays and novels from Plautus down to Walter

Scott and Jane Austen; images and similes from poets of every age and every nation, 'pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical;' shrewd thrusts from satirists, wise saws from sages, pleasantries caustic or pathetic from humorists; all these throng Macaulay's pages with the bustle and variety and animation of some glittering masque and cosmoramic revel of great books and heroical men. Hence, though Macaulay was in mental constitution one of the very least Shakesperean writers that ever lived, yet he has the Shakesperean quality of taking his reader through an immense gallery of interesting characters and striking situations. No writer can now expect to attain the widest popularity as a man of letters unless he gives to the world *multa* as well as *multum*. Sainte-Beuve, the most eminent man of letters in France in our generation, wrote no less than twenty-seven volumes of his incomparable *Causeries*. Mr. Carlyle, the most eminent man of letters in England in our generation, has taught us that silence is golden in thirty volumes. Macaulay was not so exuberantly copious as these two illustrious writers, but he had the art of being as various without being so voluminous.

There has been a great deal of deliberate and systematic imitation of Macaulay's style, often by clever men who might well have trusted to their own resources. Its most conspicuous vices are very easy to imitate, but it is impossible for any one who is less familiar with literature than Macaulay was, to reproduce his style effectively, for the reason that it is before all else the style of great literary knowledge. Nor is that all. Macaulay's knowledge was not only very wide; it was both thoroughly accurate and instantly ready. For this stream of apt illustrations he was indebted to his extraordinary memory, and his rapid eye for contrasts and analogies. They come to the end of his pen as he writes; they are not laboriously

hunted out in indexes, and then added by way of afterthought and extraneous interpolation. Hence quotations and references that in a writer even of equal knowledge, but with his wits less promptly about him, would seem mechanical and awkward, find their place in a page of Macaulay as if by a delightful process of complete assimilation and spontaneous fusion.

We may be sure that no author could have achieved Macaulay's boundless popularity among his contemporaries, unless his work had abounded in what is substantially Commonplace. Addison puts fine writing in sentiments that are natural without being obvious, and this is a true account of the 'law' of the exquisite literature of the Queen Anne men. We may perhaps add to Addison's definition, that the great secret of the best kind of popularity is always the noble or imaginative handling of Commonplace. Shakespeare may at first seem an example to the contrary; and indeed is it not a standing marvel that the greatest writer of a nation that is distinguished among all nations for the pharisaism, puritanism, and unimaginative narrowness of its judgments on conduct and type of character, should be paramount over all writers for the breadth, maturity, fulness, subtlety, and infinite variousness of his conception of human life and nature? One possible answer to the perplexity is that the puritanism does not go below the surface in us, and that Englishmen are not really limited in their view by the too strait formulas that are supposed to contain their explanations of the moral universe. On this theory the popular appreciation of Shakespeare is the irrepressible response of the hearty inner man to a voice, in which he recognises the full note of human nature, and those wonders of the world which are not dreamt of in his professed philosophy. A more obvious answer than this is that Shakespeare's popularity

with the many is not due to those finer glimpses that are the very essence of all poetic delight to the few, but to his thousand other magnificent attractions, and above all, after his skill as a pure dramatist and master of scenic interest and situation, to the lofty or pathetic setting with which he vivifies, not the subtleties or refinements, but the commonest and most elementary traits of the commonest and most elementary human moods. The few with minds touched by nature or right cultivation to the finer issues, admire the supreme genius which takes some poor Italian tale, with its coarse plot and gross personages, and shooting it through with threads of variegated meditation, produces a masterpiece of penetrative reflection and high pensive suggestion as to the deepest things and most secret parts of the life of men. But to the general these finer threads are indiscernible. What touches them in the Shakesperean poetry, and most rightly touches them and us all, are topics eternally old, yet of eternal freshness, the perennial truisms of the grave and the bride-chamber, of shifting fortune, of the surprises of destiny, and the emptiness of the answered vow. This is the region in which the poet wins his widest if not his hardest triumphs, the region of the noble Commonplace.

A writer dealing with such matters as principally occupied Macaulay, has not the privilege of resort to these great poetic inspirations. Yet history, too, has its generous commonplaces, its plausibilities of emotion, and no one has ever delighted more than Macaulay did, to appeal to the fine truisms that cluster round love of freedom and love of native land. The high rhetorical topics of liberty and patriotism are his readiest instruments for kindling a glowing reflection of these magnanimous passions in the breasts of his readers. That Englishman is hardly to be envied who can read without a glow such passages as that in the History, about Turenne being startled

by the shout of stern exultation with which his English allies advanced to the combat, and expressing the delight of a true soldier when he learned that it was ever the fashion of Cromwell's pikemen to rejoice greatly when they beheld the enemy; while even the banished cavaliers felt an emotion of national pride when they saw a brigade of their countrymen, outnumbered by foes and abandoned by friends, drive before it in headlong rout the finest infantry of Spain, and force a passage into a counterscarp which had just been pronounced impregnable by the ablest of the marshals of France. Such prose as this is not less thrilling to a man who loves his country, than the spirited verse of the Lays of Ancient Rome. And the commonplaces of patriotism and freedom would never have been so powerful in Macaulay's hands, if they had not been inspired by a sincere and hearty faith in them in the soul of the writer. His unanalytical turn of mind kept him free of any temptation to think of love of country as a prejudice, or a passion for freedom as an illusion. The cosmopolitan or international idea which such teachers as Cobden have tried to impress on our stubborn islanders, would have found in Macaulay not lukewarm or sceptical adherence, but pointblank opposition and denial. He believed as stoutly in the supremacy of Great Britain in the history of the good causes of Europe, as M. Thiers believes in the supremacy of France, or Mazzini believed in that of Italy. The thought of the prodigious industry, the inventiveness, the stout enterprise, the free government, the wise and equal laws, the noble literature, of this fortunate island and its majestic empire beyond the seas, and the discretion, valour, and tenacity by which all these great material and still greater intangible possessions had been first won, and then kept, against every hostile comer whether domestic or foreign, sent through Macaulay a thrill, like that which the

thought of Paris and its heroisms moves in the great poet of France, or sight of the dear city of the Violet Crown moved in an Athenian of old. Thus habitually, with all sincerity of heart, to offer to one of the greater popular pre-possessions the incense due to any other idol of superstition, sacred and of indisputable authority, and to let this adoration be seen shining in every page, is one of the keys that every man must find, who would make a quick and sure way into the temple of contemporary fame.

It is one of the first things to be said about Macaulay, that he was in exact accord with the common average sentiment of his day on every subject on which he spoke. His superiority was not of that highest kind which leads a man to march in thought on the outside margin of the crowd, watching them, sympathising with them, hoping for them, but apart. Macaulay was one of the middle-class crowd in his heart, and only rose above it by splendid attainments and extraordinary gifts of expression. He had none of that ambition which inflames some hardy men, to make new beliefs and new passions enter the minds of their neighbours; his ascendancy is due to literary pomp, not to fecundity of spirit. No one has ever surpassed him in the art of combining resolute and ostentatious common sense of a slightly coarse sort in choosing his point of view, with so considerable an appearance of dignity and elevation in setting it forth and impressing it upon others. The elaborateness of his style is very likely to mislead people into imagining for him a corresponding elaborateness of thought and sentiment. On the contrary, Macaulay's mind was really very simple, strait, and with as few notes in its register, to borrow a phrase from the language of vocal compass, as there are few notes, though they are very loud, in the register of his written prose. When we look more closely into it, what at first

wore the air of dignity and elevation, in truth rather disagreeably resembles the narrow assurance of a man who knows that he has with him the great battalions of public opinion. We are always quite sure that if Macaulay had been an Athenian citizen towards the ninety-fifth Olympiad, he would have taken sides with Anytus and Meletus in the impeachment of Socrates. A popular author must, in a thoroughgoing way, take the accepted maxims for granted. He must suppress any whimsical fancy for applying the Socratic elenchus, or any other engine of criticism, scepticism, or verification, to those sentiments or current precepts of morals, which may in truth be very equivocal and may be much neglected in practice, but which the public opinion of his time requires to be treated in theory and in literature as if they had been cherished and held sacred *semper, ubique, et ab omnibus.*

This is just what Macaulay does, and it is commonly supposed to be no heavy fault in him or any other writer for the common public. Man cannot live by analysis alone, nor nourish himself on the secret delights of irony. And if Macaulay had only reflected the more generous of the prejudices of mankind, it would have been well enough. Burke, for instance, was a writer who revered the prejudices of a modern society as deeply as Macaulay did; he believed society to be founded on prejudices and held compact by them. Yet what size there is in Burke, what fine perspective, what momentum, what edification! It may be pleaded that there is the literature of edification, and there is the literature of knowledge, and that the qualities proper to the one cannot lawfully be expected from the other, and would only be very much out of place if they should happen to be found there. But there are two answers to this. First, Macaulay in the course of his varied writings discusses all sorts of ethical and other matters,

and is not simply a chronicler of party and intrigue, of dynasties and campaigns. Second, and more than this, even if he had never travelled beyond the composition of historical record, he could still have sown his pages, as does every truly great writer, no matter what his subject may be, with those significant images or far-reaching suggestions, which suddenly light up a whole range of distant thoughts and sympathies within us; which in an instant affect the sensibilities of men with a something new and unforeseen; and which awaken, if only for a passing moment, the faculty and response of the diviner mind. Tacitus does all this, and Burke does it, and that is why men who care nothing for Roman despots or for Jacobin despots, will still perpetually turn to those writers almost as if they were on the level of great poets or very excellent spiritual teachers.

One secret is that they, and all such men as they were, had that of which Macaulay can hardly have had the rudimentary germ, the faculty of deep abstract meditation and surrender to the frutiful 'leisures of the spirit.' We can picture Macaulay talking, or making a speech in the House of Commons, or buried in a book, or scouring his library for references, or covering his blue foolscap with dashing periods, or accentuating his sentences and barbing his phrases; but can anybody think of him as meditating, as modestly pondering and wondering, as possessed for so much as ten minutes by that spirit of inwardness, which has never been wholly wanting in any of those kings and princes of literature, with whom it is good for men to sit in counsel? He seeks Truth, not as she should be sought, devoutly, tentatively, and with the air of one touching the hem of a sacred garment, but clutching her by the hair of the head and dragging her after him in a kind of boisterous triumph, a prisoner of war and not a goddess.

All this finds itself reflected, as the inner temper of a man always is reflected, in his style of written prose. The merits of Macaulay's prose are obvious enough. It naturally reproduces the good qualities of his understanding, its strength, manliness, and directness. That exultation in material goods and glories of which we have already spoken, makes his pages rich in colour, and gives them the effect of a sumptuous gala-suit. Certainly the brocade is too brand-new, and has none of the delicate charm that comes to such finery when it is a little faded. Again, nobody can have any excuse for not knowing exactly what it is that Macaulay means. We may assuredly say of his prose what Boileau says of his own poetry—'Et mon vers, bien ou mal, dit toujours quelque chose.' This is a prodigious merit, when we reflect with what fatal alacrity human language lends itself in the hands of so many performers upon the pliant instrument, to all sorts of obscurity, ambiguity, disguise and pretentious mystification. Scaliger is supposed to have remarked of the Basques and their desperate tongue: ''Tis said the Basques understand one another; for my part, I will never believe it.' The same pungent doubt might apply to loftier members of the hierarchy of speech than that forlorn dialect, but never to English as handled by Macaulay. He never wrote an obscure sentence in his life, and this may seem a small merit, until we remember of how few writers we could say the same.

Macaulay is of those who think prose as suceptible of polished and definite form as verse, and he was, we should suppose, of those also who hold the type and mould of all written language to be spoken language. There are more reasons for demurring to the soundness of the latter doctrine, than can conveniently be made to fill a digression here. For one thing, spoken language necessarily implies one or more listeners,

whereas written language may often have to express meditative moods and trains of inward reflection that move through the mind without trace of external reference, and that would lose their special traits by the introduction of any suspicion that they were to be overheard. Again, even granting that all composition must be supposed to be meant, by the fact of its existence, to be addressed to a body of readers, it still remains to be shown that indirect address to the inner ear should follow the same method and rhythm as address directly through impressions on the outer organ. The attitude of the recipient mind is different, and there is the symbolism of a new medium between it and the speaker. The writer, being cut off from all those effects which are producible by the physical intonations of the voice, has to find substitutes for them by other means, by subtler cadences, by a more varied modulation, by firmer notes, by more complex circuits, than suffice for the utmost perfection of spoken language, which has all the potent and manifold aids of personality. In writing, whether it be prose or verse, you are free to produce effects whose peculiarity one can only define vaguely, by saying that the senses have one part less in them than in any other of the forms and effects of art, and the imaginary voice one part more. But the question need not be laboured here, because there can be no dispute as to the quality of Macaulay's prose. Its measures are emphatically the measures of spoken deliverance. Those who have made the experiment, pronounce him to be one of the authors whose works are most admirably fitted for reading aloud. His firmness and directness of statement, his spiritedness, his art of selecting salient and highly coloured detail, and all his other merits as a narrator, keep the listener's attention, and make him the easiest of writers to follow.

Although, however, clearness, directness, and positiveness

are master qualities and the indispensable foundations of all good style, yet does the matter plainly by no means end with them. And it is even possible to have these virtues so unhappily proportioned and inauspiciously mixed with other turns and casts of mind, as to end in work with little grace or harmony or fine tracery about it, but only overweening purpose and vehement will. And it is overweeningness and self-confident will that are the chief notes of Macaulay's style. It has no benignity. Energy is doubtless a delightful quality, but then Macaulay's energy is perhaps energy without momentum, and he impresses us more by a strong volubility than by volume. It is the energy of interests and intuitions, which though they are profoundly sincere if ever they were sincere in any man, are yet in the relations which they comprehend, essentially superficial.

Still, trenchancy whether in speaker or writer is a most effective tone for a large public. It gives them confidence in their man, and prevents tediousness—except to those who reflect how delicate is the poise of truth, and what steeps and pits encompass the dealer in unqualified propositions. To such persons, a writer who is trenchant in every sentence of every page, who never lapses for a line into the contingent, who marches through the intricacies of things in a blaze of certainty, is not only a writer to be distrusted, but the owner of a doubtful and displeasing style. It is a great test of style to watch how an author disposes of the qualifications, limitations, and exceptions that clog the wings of his main proposition. The grave and conscientious men of the seventeenth century insisted on packing them all honestly along with the main proposition itself, within the bounds of a single period. Burke arranges them in tolerably close order in the paragraph. Dr. Newman, that winning writer, disperses them lightly over his

page. Of Macaulay it is hardly unfair to say that he dispatches all qualifications into outer space before he begins to write, or if he magnanimously admits one or two here and there, it is only to bring them the more imposingly to the same murderous end.

We have spoken of Macaulay's interests and intuitions wearing a certain air of superficiality; there is a feeling of the same kind about his attempts to be genial. It is not truly festive. There is no abandonment in it. It has no deep root in moral humour, and is merely a literary form, resembling nothing so much as the hard geniality of some clever college tutor of stiff manners, entertaining undergraduates at an official breakfast-party. This is not because his tone is bookish; on the contrary, his tone and level are distinctly those of the man of the world. But one always seems to find that neither a wide range of cultivation, nor familiar access to the best Whig circles, had quite removed the stiffness and self-conscious precision of the Clapham Sect. We would give much for a little more flexibility, and would welcome ever so slight a consciousness of infirmity. As has been said, the only people whom men cannot pardon are the perfect. Macaulay is like the military king who never suffered himself to be seen, even by the attendants in his bedchamber, until he had had time to put on his uniform and jack-boots. His severity of eye is very wholesome; it makes his writing firm, and firmness is certainly one of the first qualities that good writing must have. But there is such a thing as soft and considerate precision, as well as hard and scolding precision. Those most interesting English critics of the generation slightly anterior to Macaulay,—Hazlitt, Lamb, De Quincey, Leigh Hunt,—were fully his equals in precision, and yet they knew how to be clear, acute, and definite, without that edginess and inelasticity which is so

conspicuous in Macaulay's criticisms, alike in their matter and their form.

To borrow the figure of an old writer, Macaulay's prose is not like a flowing vestment to his thought, but like a suit of armour. It is often splendid and glittering, and the movement of the opening pages of his History is superb in its dignity. But that movement is exceptional. As a rule there is the hardness, if there is also often the sheen, of highly-wrought metal. Or, to change our figure, his pages are composed as a handsome edifice is reared, not as a fine statue or a frieze 'with bossy sculptures graven' grows up in the imaginative mind of the statuary. There is no liquid continuity, such as indicates a writer possessed by his subject and not merely possessing it. The periods are marshalled in due order of procession, bright and high-stepping; they never escape under an impulse of emotion into the full current of a brimming stream. What is curious is that though Macaulay seems ever to be brandishing a two-edged gleaming sword, and though he steeps us in an atmosphere of belligerency, yet we are never conscious of inward agitation in him, and perhaps this alone would debar him from a place among the greatest writers. For they, under that reserve, suppression, or management, which is an indispensable condition of the finest rhetorical art, even when aiming at the most passionate effects, still succeed in conveying to their readers a thrilling sense of the strong fires that are glowing underneath. Now when Macaulay advances with his hectoring sentences and his rough pistolling ways, we feel all the time that his pulse is as steady as that of the most practised duellist who ever ate fire. He is too cool to be betrayed into a single phrase of happy improvisation. His pictures glare, but are seldom warm. Those strokes of minute circumstantiality which he loved so dearly, show that even in moments when his ima-

gination might seem to be moving both spontaneously and ardently, it was really only a literary instrument, a fashioning tool and not a melting flame. Let us take a single example. He is describing the trial of Warren Hastings. 'Every step in the proceedings,' he says, 'carried the mind either backward through many troubled centuries to the days when the foundations of our constitution were laid; or far away over boundless seas and deserts, to dusky nations living under strange stars, worshipping strange gods, and writing strange characters from right to left.' The odd triviality of the last detail, its unworthiness of the sentiment of the passage, leaves the reader checked; what sets out as a fine stroke of imagination dwindles down to a sort of literary conceit. And this puerile twist, by the way, is all the poorer, when it is considered that the native writing is really from left to right, and only takes the other direction in a foreign, that is to say, a Persian alphabet. And so in other places, even where the writer is most deservedly admired for gorgeous picturesque effect, we feel that it is only the literary picturesque, a kind of infinitely glorified newspaper-reporting. Compare, for instance, the most imaginative piece to be found in any part of Macaulay's writings with that sudden and lovely apostrophe in Carlyle, after describing the bloody horrors that followed the fall of the Bastille in 1789:—'O evening sun of July, how, at this hour, thy beams fall slant on reapers amid peaceful woody fields; on old women spinning in cottages; on ships far out in the silent main; on balls at the Orangerie at Versailles, where high-rouged dames of the Palace are even now dancing with double-jacketed Hussar officers;—and also on this roaring Hell-porch of a Hôtel de Ville!' Who does not feel in this the breath of poetic inspiration, and how different it is from the mere composite of the rhetorician's imagination, assiduously working to order?

This remark is no disparagement of Macaulay's genius, but a classification of it. We are interrogating our own impressions, and asking ourselves among what kind of writers he ought to be placed. Rhetoric is a good and worthy art, and rhetorical authors are often more useful, more instructive, more really respectable than poetical authors. But it is to be said that Macaulay as a rhetorician will hardly be placed in the first rank, by those who have studied both him and the great masters. Once more, no amount of embellishment or emphasis or brilliant figure suffices to produce this intense effect of agitation rigorously restrained; nor can any beauty of decoration be in the least a substitute for that touching and penetrative music, which is made in prose by the repressed trouble of grave and high souls. There is a certain music, we do not deny, in Macaulay, but it is the music of a man everlastingly playing for us rapid solos on a silver trumpet, never the swelling diapasons of the organ, and never the deep ecstasies of the four magic strings. That so sensible a man as Macaulay should keep clear of the modern abomination of dithyrambic prose, that rank and sprawling weed of speech, was natural enough; but then the effects which we miss in him, and which, considering how strong the literary faculty in him really was, we are almost astonished to miss, are not produced by dithyramb but by repression. Of course the answer has been already given; Macaulay, powerful and vigorous as he was, had no agitation, no wonder, no tumult of spirit to repress. The world was spread out clear before him; he read it as plainly and as certainly as he read his books; life was all an affair of direct categoricals.

This was at least one secret of those hard modulations and shallow cadences. How poor is the rhythm of Macaulay's prose, we only realise by going with his periods fresh in our

ear to some true master of harmony. It is not worth while to quote passages from an author who is in everybody's library, and Macaulay is always so much like himself that almost any one page will serve for an illustration exactly as well as any other. Let any one turn to his character of Somers, for whom he had so much admiration, and then turn to Clarendon's character of Falkland;—'a person of such prodigious parts of learning and knowledge, of that inimitable sweetness and delight in conversation, of so flowing and obliging a humanity and goodness to mankind, and of that primitive simplicity and integrity of life, that if there were no other brand upon this odious and accursed civil war than that single loss, it must be most infamous and execrable to all posterity.' Now Clarendon is not a great writer, nor even a good writer, for he is prolix and involved, yet we see that even Clarendon, when he comes to a matter in which his heart is engaged, becomes sweet and harmonious in his rhythm. If we turn to a prose-writer of the very first place, we are instantly conscious of a still greater difference. How flashy and shallow Macaulay's periods seem, as we listen to the fine ground-base that rolls in the melody of the following passage of Burke's, and it is taken from one of the least ornate of all his pieces:—

'You will not, we trust, believe, that, born in a civilized country, formed to gentle manners, trained in a merciful religion, and living in enlightened and polished times, where even foreign hostility is softened from its original sternness, we could have thought of letting loose upon you, our late beloved brethren, these fierce tribes of savages and cannibals, in whom the traces of human nature are effaced by ignorance and barbarity. We rather wished to have joined with you in bringing gradually that unhappy part of mankind into civility, order, piety, and virtuous discipline, than to have confirmed their evil habits and increased their natural ferocity by fleshing them in the slaughter of you, whom our wiser and

better ancestors had sent into the wilderness with the express view of introducing, along with our holy religion, humane and charitable manners. We do not hold that all things are lawful in war. We should think every barbarity, every excess, in wasting, in murders, in tortures, and other cruelties, to be horrible and too full of turpitude for Christian mouths to utter or ears to hear, if done at our instigation, by those who we know will make war thus if they make it at all, to be, to all intents and purposes, as if done by ourselves. We clear ourselves to you our brethren, to the present age, and to future generations, to our king and our country, and to Europe, which as a spectator, beholds this tragic scene, of every part or share in adding this last and worst of evils to the inevitable mischiefs of a civil war.

'We do not call you rebels and traitors. We do not call for the vengeance of the crown against you. We do not know how to qualify millions of our countrymen, contending with one heart for an admission to privileges which we have ever thought our own happiness and honour, by odious and unworthy names. On the contrary, we highly revere the principles on which you act, though we lament some of their effects. Armed as you are, we embrace you, as our friends and as our brethren by the best and dearest ties of relation.'

It may be said that there is a patent injustice in comparing the prose of a historian criticising or describing great events at second hand, with the prose of a statesman taking active part in great events, fired by the passion of a present conflict, and stimulated by the vivid interest of undetermined issues. If this be a well-grounded plea, and it may be so, then of course it excludes a contrast not only with Burke, but also with Bolingbroke, whose fine manners and polished gaiety give us a keen sense of the grievous garishness of Macaulay. If we may not imitate a comparison between Macaulay and great actors on the stage of affairs, at least there can be no objection to the introduction of Southey as a standard of comparison. Southey

was a man of letters pure and simple, and it is worth remarking that Macaulay himself admitted that he found so great a charm in Southey's style, as nearly always to read it with pleasure, even when Southey was talking nonsense. Now, take any page of the Life of Nelson or the Life of Wesley; consider how easy, smooth, natural, and winning is the diction and the rise and fall of the sentence, and yet how varied the rhythm and how nervous the phrases; and then turn to a page of Macaulay, and wince under its stamping emphasis, its overcoloured tropes, its exaggerated expressions, its unlovely staccato. Southey's History of the Peninsular War is now dead, but if any of my readers has a copy on his highest shelves, I would venture to ask him to take down the third volume, and read the concluding pages, of which Coleridge used to say that they were the finest specimen of historic eulogy he had ever read in English, adding with forgivable hyperbole, that they were more to the Duke's fame and glory than a campaign. 'Foresight and enterprise with our commander went hand in hand; he never advanced but so as to be sure of his retreat; and never retreated but in such an attitude as to impose upon a superior enemy,' and so on through the sum of Wellington's achievements. 'There was something more precious than these, more to be desired than the high and enduring fame which he had secured by his military achievements, the satisfaction of thinking to what end those achievements had been directed; that they were for the deliverance of two most injured and grievously oppressed nations; for the safety, honour, and welfare of his own country; and for the general interests of Europe and of the civilized world. His campaigns were sanctified by the cause; they were sullied by no cruelties, no crimes; the chariot-wheels of his triumphs have been followed by no curses; his laurels are

entwined with the amaranths of righteousness, and upon his death-bed he might remember his victories among his good works.'

What is worse than want of depth and fineness of intonation in a period, is all gross excess of colour, because excess of colour is connected with graver faults in the region of the intellectual conscience. Macaulay is a constant sinner in this respect. The wine of truth is in his cup a brandied draught, a hundred degrees above proof, and he too often replenishes the lamp of knowledge with naptha instead of fine oil. It is not that he has a spontaneous passion for exuberant decoration, which he would have shared with more than one of the greatest names in literature. On the contrary, we feel that the exaggerated words and dashing sentences are the fruit of deliberate travail, and the petulance or the irony of his speech is mostly due to a driving predilection for strong effects. His memory, his directness, his aptitude for forcing things into firm outline, and giving them a sharply defined edge,—these and other singular talents of his all lent themselves to this intrepid and indefatigable pursuit of effect. And the most disagreeable feature is that Macaulay was so often content with an effect of an essentially vulgar kind, offensive to taste, discordant to the fastidious ear, and worst of all, at enmity with the whole spirit of truth. By vulgar we certainly do not mean homely, which marks a wholly different quality. No writer can be more homely than Mr. Carlyle, alike in his choice of particulars to dwell upon, and in the terms or images in which he describes or illustrates them, but there is also no writer further removed from vulgarity. Nor do we mean that Macaulay too copiously enriches the tongue with infusion from any Doric dialect. For such raciness he had little taste. What we find in him is that quality which the French call brutal.

The description, for instance, in the essay on Hallam, of the license of the Restoration, seems to us a coarse and vulgar picture, whose painter took the most garish colours he could find on his palette, and then laid them on in untempered crudity. And who is not sensible of the vulgarity and coarseness of the account of Boswell? 'If he had not been a great fool, he would not have been a great writer . . . . he was a dunce, a parasite, and a coxcomb,' and so forth, in which the shallowness of the analysis of Boswell's character matches the puerile rudeness of the terms. Here again, is a sentence about Montesquieu. 'The English at that time,' Macaulay says of the middle of the eighteenth century, 'considered a Frenchman who talked about constitutional checks and fundamental laws as a prodigy not less astonishing than the learned pig or musical infant.' And he then goes on to describe the author of one of the most important books that ever were written, as 'specious but shallow, studious of effect, indifferent to truth—the lively President,' and so forth, stirring in any reader who happens to know Montesquieu's influence, a singular amazement. We are not concerned with the judgment upon Montesquieu, nor with the truth as to contemporary English opinion about him, but a writer who devises an antithesis to such a man as Montesquieu in learned pigs and musical infants, deliberately condescends not merely to triviality or levity, but to flat vulgarity of thought, to something of mean and ignoble association. Though one of the most common, this is not Macaulay's only sin in the same unfortunate direction. He too frequently resorts to vulgar gaudiness. For example, there is in one place a certain description of an alleged practice of Addison's. Swift had said of Esther Johnson that 'whether from her easiness in general, or from her indifference to persons, or from her despair of mending them, or from the same practice which she most liked

in Mr. Addison, I cannot determine; but when she saw any of the company very warm in a wrong opinion, she was more inclined to confirm them in it than to oppose them. It prevented noise, she said, and saved time.'[1] Let us behold what a picture Macaulay draws on the strength of this passage. 'If his first attempts to set a presuming dunce right were ill-received,' Macaulay says of Addison, 'he changed his tone, 'assented with civil leer,' and lured the flattered coxcomb deeper and deeper into absurdity.' To compare this transformation of the simplicity of the original into the grotesque heat and overcharged violence of the copy, is to see the homely maiden of a country village transformed into the painted flaunter of the city.

One more instance. We should be sorry to violate any sentiment of τὸ σεμνόν about a man of Macaulay's genius, but what is a decorous term for a description of the doctrine of Lucretius's great poem, thrown in parenthetically, as the 'silliest and meanest system of natural and moral philosophy'? Even disagreeable artifices of composition may be forgiven, when they serve to vivify truth, to quicken or to widen the moral judgment, but Macaulay's hardy and habitual recourse to strenuous superlatives is fundamentally unscientific and untrue. There is no more instructive example in our literature than he, of the saying that the adjective is the enemy of the substantive.

In 1837 Jeffrey saw a letter written by Macaulay to a common friend, and stating the reasons for preferring a literary to a political life. Jeffrey thought that his illustrious ally was wrong in the conclusion to which he came. 'As to the tranquillity of an author's life,' he said, 'I have no sort of faith in it. And as to fame, if an author's is now and then more

[1] Forster's 'Swift,' i. 265.

lasting, it is generally longer withheld, and except in a few rare cases it is of a less pervading or elevating description. A great poet or a great *original* writer is above all other glory. But who would give much for such a glory as Gibbon's? Besides, I believe it is in the inward glow and pride of consciously influencing the destinies of mankind, much more than in the sense of personal reputation, that the delight of either poet or statesman chiefly consists.' And Gibbon had at least the advantage of throwing himself into a religious controversy that is destined to endure for centuries. He, moreover, was specifically a historian, while Macaulay has been prized less as a historian proper, than as a master of literary art. Now a man of letters, in an age of battle and transition like our own, fades into an ever-deepening distance, unless he has while he writes that touching and impressive quality,—the presentiment of the eve; a feeling of the difficulties and interests that will engage and distract mankind on the morrow. Nor can it be enough for enduring fame in any age merely to throw a golden halo round the secularity of the hour, or to make glorious the narrowest limitations of the passing day. If we think what a changed sense is already given to criticism, what a different conception now presides over history, how many problems on which Macaulay was silent are now the familiar puzzles of even superficial readers, we cannot help feeling that the eminent man whose life we are all about to read, is the hero of a past which is already remote, and that he did little to make men better fitted to face a present of which, close as it was to him, he seems hardly to have dreamed.

THE END.

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